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Easter Morning

*Tomb, thou shalt not hold him longer;
Death is strong, but life is stronger;
Stronger than dark, the light;
Stronger than wrong, the right;
Faith and hope triumphant say,
"Christ will rise on Easter Day!"*

*While the patient earth lies waking
Till the morning shall be breaking,
Shuddering 'neath the burden dread
Of her Master, cold and dead,
Hark! She hears the angels say,
"Christ will rise on Easter Day!"*

*And when sunrise smites the mountains,
Pouring light from heavenly fountains,
Then the earth blooms out to greet
Once again the blessed feet;
And her countless voices say,
"Christ has risen on Easter Day!"*

Phillips Brooks (1835 -1893)



The colorful depiction of the Risen Christ is by Dr. He Qi, a professor at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in China and a tutor for master candidate students in the Philosophy Department of Nanjing University. He is also a member of the China Art Association and a council member of the Asian Christian Art Association.

He has been committed to the artistic creation of modern Chinese Christian Art since 1983. He hopes to help change the "foreign image" of Christianity in China by using artistic language, and at the same

time, to supplement Chinese Art the way Buddhist art did in ancient times. In his works, He Qi has blended together Chinese folk customs and traditional Chinese painting techniques with the western art of the Middle and Modern Ages, and has created an artistic style of color-on-paper painting.

Robert Brusic St. Paul Luther Seminary Pastor, says:

He Qi presents us with art that connects us to the biblical story in a fresh, even a surprising way. He is both story-teller and evangelist in his art. He is not

only preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, but he is also conveying a message that transcends cultural types. In seeking to de-westernize the Christian story, he is trying to open our eyes to the universal implications of the larger and all-encompassing narrative of God's love for all creation.

The smaller work is The Empty Tomb.

For stunning prints by He Qi based on the life of Christ see http://www.heqigallery.com/shop/Easter_Special_Prints.html

News

Russians' political apathy frustrates feisty young journalist

Anastasia Chukovskaya sees a desire for stability that comes at the expense of freedoms.

Christa Case Bryant

Moscow — As a first-year journalism student, Anastasia Chukovskaya envisioned herself peering down Russia's dark alleys, scratching out truth on a flimsy notebook. An intern with the BBC, she looked up to veteran Russian reporters like Anna Politkovskaya, renowned for exposing human rights abuses.

Then, in 2006, Ms. Politkovskaya was shot in an apparent contract killing. Deeply affected, Ms. Chukovskaya quit political journalism and took a job with *Elle* magazine, which features her latest story: Russians volunteering for charity.

"People here do not need my truth," says Chukovskaya. "Why should I risk my life when they don't care?"

Working full time while she finishes her degree, Chukovskaya is surrounded by peers who, she says, talk about kids, stars, love, fashion — everything but politics. To her, it's a sign that the traditional Russian preference for a paternalistic — if not autocratic — state has reasserted itself after what many Russians see as the dismal experiment with liberal democracy in the 1990s. But in contrast to many of her generation, the young journalist energetically refuses to settle for a stability that, she argues, comes at the expense of freedom.

Maybe her defiance is rooted in the six years she spent in the US during her childhood, or the fact that she claims two distinguished great-grandfathers who both tangled with the Soviet state: children's poet Korney Chukovsky and renowned composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Or maybe it's just her familiarity with Western media. But Chukovskaya doesn't lack for words when she talks about the thrill of investigative projects or comments on the five newspapers she reads daily, dishing out wry remarks about a headline calling President Vladimir Putin's protégé "the new president" ("He hasn't been elected yet!") or a Russian Orthodox mass dedicated to nuclear weapons ("That's absurd!").

Just 21, she has already served as an assistant to visiting foreign correspondents and landed a regular gig freelancing for *Cosmopolitan*. "All you need to do is send in three good story ideas," she says, walking briskly through the February slush after a long day at *Elle*, a firm grip on her weathered leather briefcase.

Chukovskaya also worked with the prominent French director Nino Kirtadze on "Durakovo: Village of Fools," a documentary about a Russian Orthodox businessman. The film won an award at last month's Sundance film festival — and inspired her thesis on what she says is the manipulation of religion in Russia. "The



main idea of the film was to show what Russian think about themselves, and what I heard shocked me," she says. "They say that all men who have power, have the power from God. If Putin has power, he has it from God ... for me, it is something barbarian."

For a society accustomed to strong leadership and paternalistic government, the country's controlled political situation and resurgent economy is a welcome relief to many. But critics warn of authoritarianism masquerading as democracy.

"[Mr.] Putin cares about image, about appearances ... but there are no checks and balances, no accountability, no relevant opposition," says Masha Lipman, a liberal political analyst at Moscow's Carnegie Center. "This government is sophisticated, it's subtle."

Trappings of democracy?

Russia indeed wears many of the trappings of democracy: well-attended elections with numerous parties and candidates; national and regional parliaments; a public chamber of civil society representatives; and media reports lambasting the government. Putin appears set to make good on his promise to fulfill his constitutional requirement to relinquish the presidency when his second consecutive term expires this spring.

But the probable election on Sunday of Gazprom chief and longtime Putin aide Dmitri Medvedev has sparked speculation that the president will attempt to maintain his influence in a beefed-up prime minister's post under Mr. Medvedev — just the latest example of the consolidation of power that has characterized his eight-year tenure.

Political parties must now win 7 percent of the vote — up from 3 percent — to enter the State Duma, or parliament. Deputies are chosen by their parties and regional governors are nominated by the president. And with nearly every media outlet controlled by the state, few journalists have the will or means to expose government misdeeds.

An Amnesty International report released this week, citing the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, expressed concern that the "fundamental rights" of freedom of expression, association, and assembly have been curtailed under Putin. And last week, the New-York based Human Rights Watch detailed how a 2006 law on nongovernmental organizations has "targeted various NGOs that work on controversial issues, seek to galvanize public dissent, or receive foreign funding."

"Putin did roll back democracy and things are more authoritarian," says Andrei Zolotov, the editor of *Russia Profile*, a state-funded English news magazine. "But the West also underestimates the importance of stability."

For many Russians, the humiliations of daily life just a decade ago still linger. Wives of foreign intelligence agents had to take jobs to support their husbands and teachers cleaned houses on the side to make ends meet. Young people unloaded trucks of sugar to get a prime spot in line the next day to actually buy some, and shabbily dressed businessmen ate for two or three at company dinners. Teens lost friends, sometimes dozens, to drugs and armed bandit groups.

Now, the streets are safer, salaries are better, and supermarkets are full. But in the political market, choice is limited. "In America, it's so great, you can choose Clinton or Obama, or ... who's this guy? McCain," says Chukovskaya wistfully. "It's like going to the supermarket and choosing between three different kinds of apples and deciding which one you want this evening. Here we just have one apple."

Broad sense of helplessness

Though people like Chukovskaya see much that needs correcting, she and many others describe an overwhelming sense of helplessness — rooted in a history of life under overbearing rulers — that stymies any

efforts at reform.

"Nobody feels that we have the power to change anything," she laments. Indeed, according to a recent survey by the liberal Levada Center, 67 percent of Russians feel they have little or no influence over government policy.

Sitting in an upscale cafe, a scarf thrown loosely around her rebellious long hair, Chukovskaya roots her society's submissiveness in Russian Orthodoxy's legacy. "When we had czars here, people were sure that they were divinely appointed by God," she explains. "Now, they think that if someone has power over you — a pope, president, or boss — they are divinely appointed. That's why you just have to listen and do what you have to do."

As journalists, Chukovskaya and her friend Alexandra Sheveleva, who joins her after a long day at the BBC, see that servitude playing out in the press.

"I think chief editors and editors know ... how news should be cooked," says Ms. Sheveleva, poring over the menu, which offers tea starting at \$8 a cup.

Government supporters often counter such criticism by pointing to Ekho Moscovy, a hard-hitting radio station based in Moscow. But Chukovskaya discounts its existence as evidence of freedom of expression. "I have the feeling as if it is there for the government to say, 'Oh no, we have opposition,'" she says.

"Our radio exists for Condo-leezza Rice," agrees Sheveleva dryly, noting the US Secretary of State's concern about democracy's decline under Putin.

But without a network of robust democratic institutions, such outlets don't have the same ability to act as a catalyst for public scrutiny as those in the West — whose stories often spark political activism, court cases, or government investigations.

"What's key about lack of press freedom," Ms. Lipman of the Carnegie Center says, "is that even though there is some investigative reporting, this does not make officials any more accountable because of what's printed."

The lure of an omniscient state

Despite being critical of reduced press freedom, however, Sheveleva can see the appeal of Putin's administration.

"When you talk to ... people who are close to power, they are so optimistic and they just involve you in this feeling. You think, 'I should be with them. I should be a patriot,'" says Sheveleva, recalling an interview with one of Putin's press secretaries. "The happiest people work in the administration of the government."

But still, she and Chukovskaya struggle to understand how their fellow citizens can be happy with Putin's government, and chalk up their compatriots' contentment to a long-cultivated image of the state as

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omniscient provider.

"The old generation, they vote for United Russia, and you say, 'Why? Your pension is so low, the healthcare system is so bad,'" says Sheveleva, who as part of her job takes calls on the air from BBC's mainly elderly shortwave radio audience. "And they say, 'the government is strong, they know what to do, they know how to run this country.'"

For Chukovskaya, who has all the restraint of a Kentucky Derby contender in the starting gate, such unquestioning reliance on the state has no place in a democracy.

"For me, democracy is something where the people are involved," she says. "You know how English parks are made? They watch where people walk and then they build paths there.... Here, no," she adds, explaining how her mother's neighbors keep treading the old path in the grass instead of using a new walkway nearby. "They will give you the model, will tell you what to do.... Maybe for some people that's good. A lot of people think we need Stalin back.... For me, democracy is where I'm involved."

"When you go through your

The breakup of Yugoslavia, which began a decade and a half ago, may now have reached its conclusion last month with the declaration of independence by the province of Kosovo. Or has it? The breakup of a federation is necessarily a difficult process, especially if there is disagreement about the internal boundaries separating its component states or provinces. Most of Yugoslavia's internal boundaries reflected the shifting frontiers between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, having little to do with ethnic or religious communal identities. Thus it was nearly inevitable that bloodshed would accompany the federation's dissolution.

Kosovo's case is different from those of, say, Slovenia and Croatia. Kosovo was a province of Serbia itself and is regarded by all Serbs as their country's historic heartland. Nevertheless it has had an ethnic Albanian majority since the end of the nineteenth century. In response to charges of Serb abuse of its inhabitants, NATO fought a largely aerial war nine years ago against Serbia, and a United Nations force has occupied the province since then. On Sunday, February 17 the province unilaterally declared its independence.

The very next day US President George W. Bush recognized this declaration, claiming that "Kosovars are now independent." Both the declaration and recognition touched off waves of protest in Serbia, including an attack on the US Embassy in Belgrade. In response US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested that it is now time for Serbs to accept that Kosovo no longer belongs to them. "We believe that the resolution of Kosovo's status will really, finally, let the Balkans begin to put its terrible history behind it. . . . It's time to move forward."

The naïveté of this statement is breathtaking, amounting to little more than wishful thinking. To expect that Serbs will simply forget their troubled past and give up their own territory because Rice says so does not make for a credible policy. In fact, it will only solidify the longstanding Serb tendency to focus on past wrongs by adding one more to the litany of grievances.

Some western politicians seem to forget that the Great War began in this part of the world. Rushing to recognize the independence of a territory that for centuries has been part of another country is an ill-considered action. Once again, the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo is a fairly recent development. If Hispanics should become a majority

in Florida or one of the southwestern states and declare independence or union with Mexico, Washington might have a change of heart.

Although I am by no means a fan of Vladimir "Stalin Lite" Putin, he is much closer to the mark in acknowledging that the recognition of this unilateral declaration of independence is a "terrifying precedent" that could effectively shatter the entire system of international relations that has endured for centuries. Indeed countries with their own separatist movements, such as Spain, Greece, Romania, Cyprus, Slovakia and even Canada, are reluctant to open the Pandora's box and are taking a go slow approach towards the issue.

Following a series of foreign and defence policy missteps over the last seven years, the US should have been cautious about adding another to its negative record. Perhaps it's time for that country to move forward and abandon the notion that it has the authority to act as arbiter over other, much smaller states' territorial integrity.

David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is the author of the award-winning *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity Press). His blog can be found at: <<http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com/>>.



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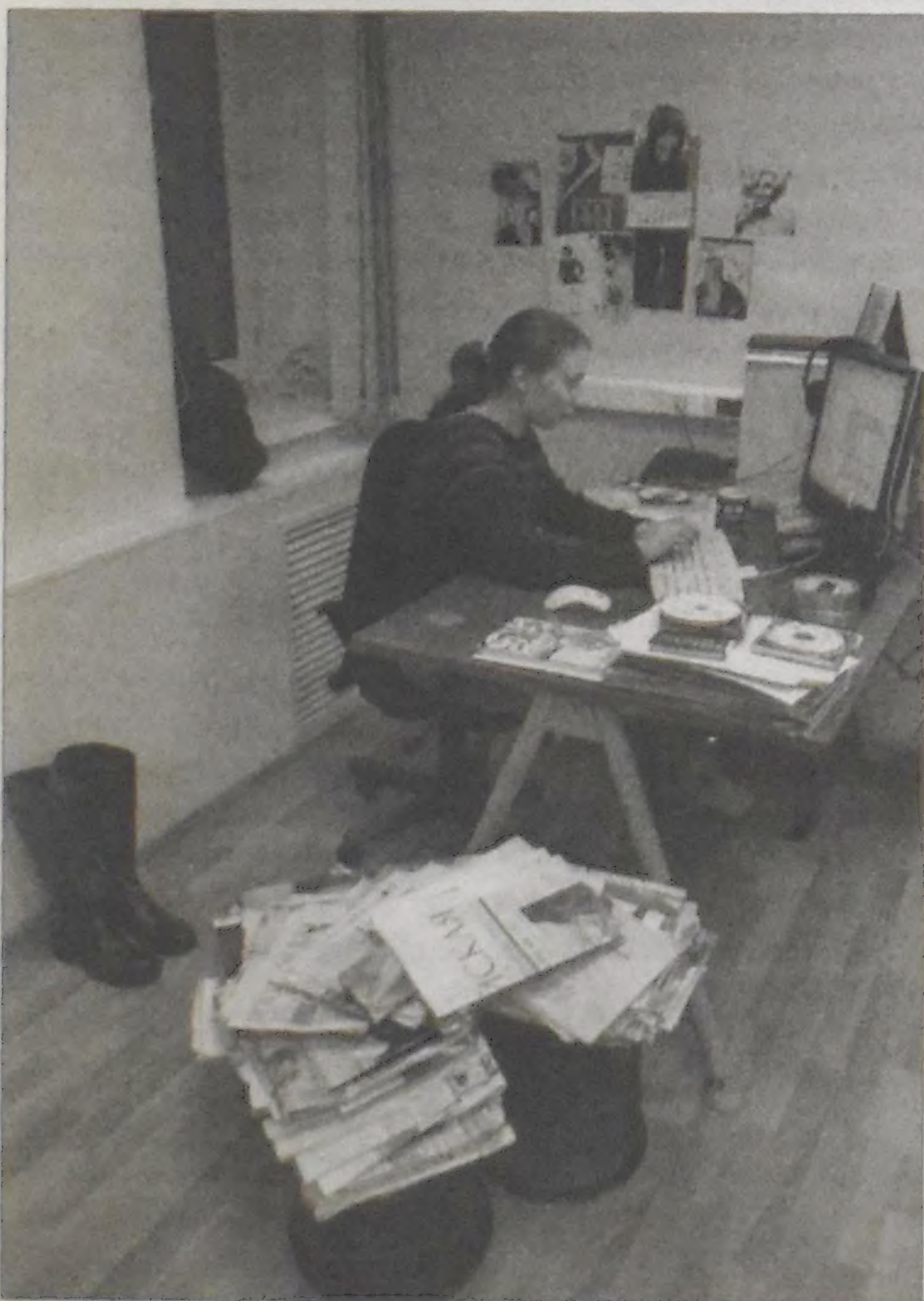
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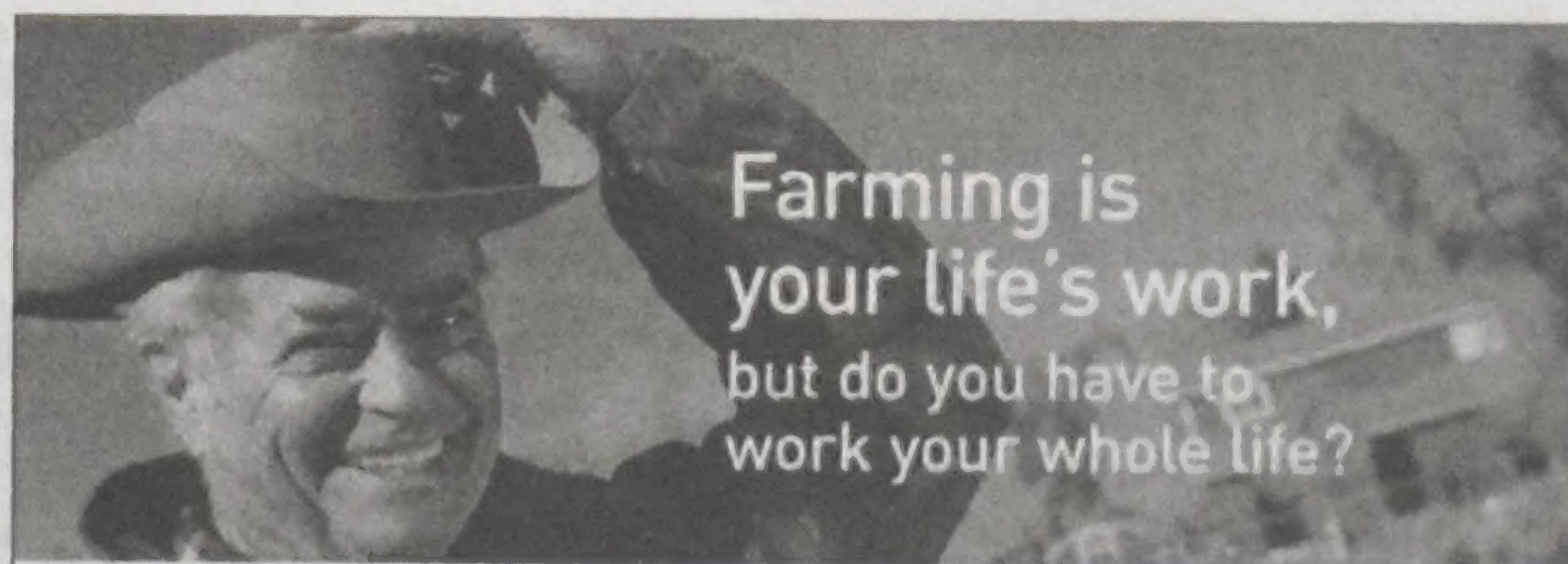


favorite path," interjects Sheveleva – not theirs.

"And someone cares that I want to," agrees Chukovskaya. She's not sure what her path will be – maybe a PhD program in Europe or America. But she can't imagine leaving Russia. Her role models are not stars or czars, but friends like Sheveleva. What's her counsel?

"In every time, there are a lot of people who are educated enough – they are the core of society, they are the moral leaders," says Sheveleva. "[Nobel laureate and novelist Alexander] Solzhenitsyn was such a person in the '80s, and the real thing we can do is to become such moral leaders."

Christa Case Bryant
is a staff writer of The
Christian Science Monitor



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Editorial

The resurrection between then and now

Harry der Nederlanden

In the last issue, I glanced at a critique by Steve Mathonnet-Vander Well of neo-Calvinism that prompted us to ask whether our stress on creation order is at the cost of our eschatological anticipation of the coming Kingdom. It does so if we think of creation as behind us, as an order that is a static foundation on which we then must build.

But God's order also embraces our orders. We are mobilized by God's mission, given a destiny and role in unfolding God's own purposes. God created things, plants and beasts in seed form. They were created not to remain forever as they were at the beginning, as if perfection and beauty cannot tolerate change. God created the ephemeral beauty of the snowdrop in the early Spring, of melting icicles glistening in the sun, of the butterfly going through its cycles, of the trees budding into leaf and flower and turning color in the Fall.

God's creation order teems with change. Some of it delightful, some of it down right scary. Volcanoes erupt from deep fissures in the earth, triggering earthquakes and lava flows. The clouds overhead churn up tornadoes, hailstorms and blizzards. We cannot simply celebrate all change as beautiful. In fact, through the ages change has more often been associated with mutability, that is, with the process of decay and death. All things are caught up in the great grindstone of time on their way to destruction.

Stuck as we are in the muddled middle, when our eyes are darkened as if by beer glass, and our minds, too, are more than a bit glazed over, we find it hard to disentangle good change from bad. Some of us tend to assume that harking back to the past is by and large a bad thing. It stifles us and holds us back from tackling the problems of the present with fresh eyes. It often prevents us from hearing and addressing the needs of our current generation and contemporary world.

Behold! We cry. God is making everything new. Why look back? God's Kingdom is a promise that bids us look ahead.

But ours is not just a future faith. The future isn't here yet. It is featureless. Where does it get those

features that make it seem so attractive? All we know of it comes from ancient roots. We get a sense of location and direction from reading old, old stories that trace the ways of God with humankind from the beginning through the pivotal middle into the future. Most of it, then, consists of memory, of events that have happened long ago. They fix us very firmly in history, in worldly history amidst a world in flux.

After the Fall, we no longer find it easy to discern what in the past are the permanent things that we ought to pack along on our journey and which are a burden of guilt and violence. Nor can we with clear eyes penetrate the mist and smoke ahead of us to discern the features – the landscape and cityscape – of the new heaven and the new earth.

How do we get from here to there?

The bridge is Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

As Van Ruler has pointed out in his reflections on I Cor. 15, the resurrection of Christ means everything to us. In it he binds us to himself and his redemptive plan. He did this by making a covenant with us. In that covenant Christ becomes the new Adam. Engrafted into the new humanity constituted by Christ, we are raised with him as new creatures with a new name, for we are part of his body.

But there's more, as the Sytsma card (p.10) illustrates so aptly, so wonderfully: "The resurrection of Jesus," writes T.F. Torrance, "heralds an entirely new age in which a universal resurrection or transformation of heaven and earth will take place, or rather has already begun to take place, for with the resurrection of Jesus that new world has already broken into the midst of the old."

We often represent the birth of this new reality in terms of natural cycles, but the resurrection cannot, of course, be simply absorbed into those natural cycles, nor into some stupendous social and political revolution, nor even into some kind of dramatic personal awakening and renewal. It is something far greater. This historical event is the very ground and source of all that positive change that we anticipate as the new order. It is the overcoming of darkness, corruption, death – of all the forces that now hold creation in thrall and that keeps history from revealing the truth and glory shining like sunrise from the end.

In the resurrection, Jesus is not just raised up *from* the realm of the dead; he is raised up *to* something. He is raised up to be the long-promised Messiah, anointed Prophet, Priest and King. He is raised up to be seated at the right hand of God from which he declares: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Rev. 1:18)

Jesus' resurrection does not extract us from our human condition and from this world of flux, this world in which the past, the present and the future keep falling apart, tumbling into ruin. It is a decisive event that affects the entire state of human existence, our total situation. And it affects not only believers but all of humanity. This new resurrection order precedes us, and by faith we enter into it. And it reconciles; it binds together.

In our individual faith, we do not just look back at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and ahead to our own with a huge gap in between. Christ's resurrection has already

transformed this world, human history and the human community. His resurrection is a present reality, it is ours not just in hope but as the spring and the source of life. It is a new environment. We are living now already in the new creation and in the end times when all things are being made new. We are here by virtue of being united with him – first in death, but then preeminently in his victory over death.

In the words of Lewis Smedes, "To be 'in Christ' is to be in the new historical order created by Jesus Christ and kept alive by his Spirit."

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was engaged with the forces of darkness and death. He took our frail, fallen human nature, subject to decay, upon himself in order to win that battle for us as our substitute. The cross is central to our faith as the place where Christ paid the price, redeemed us and made atonement for us. In our crucified Saviour we are once again welcomed into God's fellowship, united with him in love as well as in purpose.

It is in and through the resurrection that we now see the cross. It does not stand by itself as an endless humiliation and torment. Because he is risen and because he is the risen Lord, God's will – for us, for our neighbors and for all creation – becomes ours. Without the resurrection, the cross would represent nothing more than the gruesome death of a remarkable man.

But because God raised him up, the cross becomes for Christ and for us the way to never-ending life, to the conquest of death and sin.

In this new order, pain, disease, suffering and death are no longer punishments. They are no longer judgments that alienate us from God. They are the burdens we bear with Christ as we anticipate our full liberation and healing as sons and daughters of God.

It is only through his resurrection that we can have union with him and with his Spirit. For only by rising from the grave and vanquishing death does he become for us and in us the living Lord who gives new life to all things.

Paul goes as far as to say that hereby we participate in the divine nature. We become, as it were, embroiled in the very life of God himself. This does not beam us up out of our humanity, out of our relationship with others and with the world. On the contrary, by his bodily resurrection Christ fully entered into our earthly existence – not to restore it in some other realm, but here in space and time.

Christ's resurrection is a past historical event, but it rescues us from a history and existence that is condemned to crumble into dust and decay. Instead, we are enlisted in the cosmic drama of the battle against sin and death. We are made participants in God's mission and in Christ's ministry, and in that we are already more than conquerors through him who loved us.

I end with some words from Peter's Pentecost sermon in which he reaches far into the past to quote David, words which mean everything to our future:

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.

Acts 2:26-28

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Canada

Mission

Interview with David Lee

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In October 2007, Rev. David Lee, President of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Cuba since 2002, and his wife, Haydee, visited several places in Canada, including St. Catharines, Ontario, where I live. I had met this courageous couple in March 2005 when I, along with sixteen other members of Covenant CRC, assisted on a service project in Cuba. The team was led by Rev. James Dekker, pastor at Covenant, and his wife Rose.

Since Dekker's first Cuban visit with David and Haydee in August 1985, he has visited the Communist country eight times. On each occasion, he spent time with the Lee family, lodging with them, preaching in the churches where David was pastor, and teaching classes in the congregations.

Recently, I interviewed David Lee by e-mail, focusing on the history and current role of the CRC in Cuba. I am grateful to James Dekker for translating Lee's Spanish answers into English.

CC: What was life like for you and other members of the Christian community before the Cuban Revolution?

David Lee: Both sets of my grandparents left Korea, together with more than one thousand other people, in 1905, searching for a better life. In Mexico, they worked in a hemp plantation, an industry that was later replaced by plastics. In 1921, three hundred of those people arrived in Cuba to do the same work. It was difficult and poorly paid.

I was born in the city of Matanzas. When I was three years old, my poor parents moved to a rural location about three kilometers outside the city. We lived there in a family community of Korean descendants and some Mexicans. My father joined the Communist Party in the 1950s and was active in the struggle for justice. At that time, there were class divisions and racism, and, thus, discrimination and injustice. There was little chance for poor people to study and gain a more prosperous life. I knew the misery of poverty, of going barefoot, of having a poor diet, and of having difficulty in attending school.

When I was an adolescent, my parents moved to Havana, hoping for a better future. At first, life was difficult in the capital. There was no work. What little work that was available was hard to get unless you had someone who helped you. Supposedly there was much freedom, but no one had any security. While President Fulgencio Batista was in power, many young people disappeared, crime was rampant, and many abusive things happened.

CC: When was the CRC established in Cuba? How many CRCs are there in Cuba today?

David Lee: The CRC in Cuba officially began in 1957 when the then Foreign Missions Board decided to support the work



Haydee Lee, James Dekker, and David Lee seated in front of students from Beacon Christian Secondary in St. Catharines, Ontario

of Bessie Vander Valk. Years earlier she had arrived in Cuba as a social worker with no outside support. Through her contacts in the Matanzas Hospital, she had met Mrs. Virginia Gomez, who lived in Jaguey Grande, south of Matanzas, near the Bay of Pigs. Bessie had also met Vicente Izquierdo, a Cuban pastor, whom she married. They worked together in the 1940s and founded a church called The Evangelica Mission of the Interior. They built the church building there. It was dedicated on December 8, 1951.

In 1957, Christian Reformed World Missions (Foreign Missions) sent Rev. Clarence Nyenhuis and his family to work in Cuba. Their stay was brief, since after the 1959 victory of the Cuban Revolution the mission board decided that all foreign missionaries would leave (literally "abandon") the nation.

As the first Protestant church in Jaguey Grande, it spread to distant villages. Today we work actively in three provinces – Matanzas, Cienfuegos, and Havana – in more than twenty locations.

CC: Initially, what impact did the Cuban Revolution have on the church?

David Lee: There was much confusion at the start of the Revolution. The Catholic Church took a position against the Revolution and, as a result, the government imposed some general measures that caused all the churches to suffer. Religious activities were restricted in some places and not officially recognized in others.

At that time, Haydee and I had recently begun to work for the denomination in Calimete. We had a mission in a rural hamlet called Tinima – today we'd call this a house church. On Fridays, we'd go to Tinima to visit various families there who were members of the Callimete church. Even before the Revolution, we'd been holding worship services in the home of the one of women. The only transportation there was a small truck, called a "guarandinga," that went as far as Dos Rios and back. Unless one took a bicycle or horse, there was no other transportation.

One day my wife and I were detained by the police for carrying on illegal activity. We were taken from the woman's home to Manquito, a nearby village, and held for more than four hours until some soldiers arrived. We had, shall we say, a spirited conversation with them. That was on a Friday, and already on the following

Tuesday the trial was held there.

At that time, our church made use of a lawyer's services to instruct us on legal issues. On the day of the trial, he told me not to open my mouth because the plan was to sentence me for illegal and counter revolutionary activity in rural areas. I didn't say a thing. When the trial began, I was accused of proselytism.

I couldn't keep quiet and began to defend myself. This was an unforgettable experience for me! I was ready to go to jail or to be sent to a rural penal farm, but I couldn't keep quiet. So, I spoke and defended myself truthfully. Finally, I was fined sixty pesos and Haydee was fined forty pesos. If all this seems dangerous, remember that I was only twenty-five-years-old, and the only thing I wanted to do was serve the Lord the best way I could. I wasn't really thinking about anything else. I was ready to do whatever I had to do, by the grace of God.

CC: Why did you decide to stay in Cuba when so many other pastors fled?

David Lee: I decided to stay in Cuba because I had prepared to serve in my country. I was aware of the situation, the limitations, and the risks, but I felt it was my duty to preach the gospel in the best way possible right here in my own country. I never had much yearning for material things. Just like anybody else, I like good, beautiful things, but they're not my priority.

When I became a pastor in Havana, I didn't have a salary. The denomination didn't have money, nor was there an outside, sponsoring church that could give me one. But the work never stopped, and slowly one church was established, then another. The Havana congregation became the second church.

CC: How has the CRC's relationship to the Communist Party changed since the early days of the Revolution?

David Lee: The relationships of all the churches in our nation have changed since the earlier difficulties, hostilities, and insecurity. Since the 1990s, there has been a closer approach of government and the Communist Party toward all churches. The CRC has been part of this, too.

Here in Jaguey Grande, local Communist Party and government officials meet with all the religious leaders to give us information about the economic situation and various projects and developments in the municipality. We always take advantage of the occasion to discuss issues of interest to us as Christians. We take a tour to see the various projects and end the time with a lunch they provide for us.

CC: How has the CRC changed in the last decades? Is it growing and becoming a bolder witness in society?

See David Lee on page 6

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Church

Church looted and demolished in Nigeria's Kano State

Michael Ireland

KANO, NIGERIA (ANS)—A mob armed with machetes set fire to church buildings belonging to the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in Giginyu, Kano State, before looting and dismantling the property. The mob set the church office ablaze before dismantling the church's zinc roof tiles, entering the building, and looting or destroying its contents, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

The church bus was destroyed; chairs, musical instruments, ceiling fans, building blocks and two generators were removed and sold on the streets at minimum prices; and choir gowns were handed to street merchants who wore them in mockery, claiming to be bishops.

One Christian woman was assaulted and her mobile phone was taken when she attempted to call for help. Others who sought to intervene were chased away by the machete-wielding assailants.

CSW reported: "The building, which was

based in police barracks, had been earmarked for demolition, supposedly to make way for a new hospital. However the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) had received assurances from Kano state officials that there would be no demolition until an alternative site and compensation had been provided for the church."

CSW said that as tensions rose in the area following the demolition announcement, the state government initially provided police protection for the church buildings. However, this was withdrawn immediately prior to the attack, despite a promise by the Kano State Governor that the premises would receive 24-hour protection.

The day after the attack, the Kano State Commissioner for Information, Barrister Haruna Isa Denden, informed the press that the government had averted a religious crisis, and on behalf of the government took responsibility for the demolition. He also falsely claimed that the church had declined an offer of a new

site and compensation, and later alleged that compensation had already been paid.

Following strong protestations by CAN Kano, the state government agreed to meet CAN representatives on March 3 or 4 in order to compensate the church for its losses, CSW says. However, in an atmosphere strained by rumors and tensions, on March 2 angry youths from ECWA severely assaulted CAN Kano's chairman, Anglican Bishop Zakka L Nyam, as he attended an open air service in Giginyu. The attack resulted from false rumours that the Bishop had taken no action to prevent the demolition of the church.

The CSW report stated: "For several years the Kano State government has regularly ordered the demolition of churches. A team from CSW is visiting the area and has been informed that following the destruction of the ECWA church, churches in the Badawa area of Kano have been served with notice to vacate their premises. 'We are experiencing Christianity with bitterness' commented one

of the ECWA church's pastors."

CSW's Advocacy Director, Alexa Papadouris, said: "It is unacceptable that a church which has sought to cooperate with the local authorities on this forced relocation has been treated in such an appalling manner. We urge the Kano State government to fulfill its undertaking to provide adequate compensation for every loss sustained by this church and to urgently find the church a suitable alternative site. Our prayers are also with Bishop Zakka, and we hope that the poisonous atmosphere created by rumours and tensions which now divide the Christian community will soon dissipate."

CSW is a human rights organization which specializes in religious freedom, works on behalf of those persecuted for their Christian beliefs and promotes religious liberty for all.

Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent of ANS, is an international British freelance journalist formerly with a London newspaper and a frequent contributor to UCB Europe, a British Christian radio station.

End the economic embargo of Cuba, Reformed church leaders demand

Reformed church leaders from the Caribbean and North America have called for the lifting of the United States' economic embargo against Cuba in the interest of justice and right relationships.

The Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) met February 25-28 in Georgetown, Guyana, under the theme "Breaking the Chains."

CANAAC will be sending a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi asking them to lift the embargo, calling it a violation against the Cuban people and an exclusion that impoverishes and causes harsh suffering for women, men and children.

Earlier the United States said there will be no early end to the economic embargo of Cuba with the election of President Raul Castro. This

week Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's secretary of state, called the economic embargo against Cuba "ethically unacceptable."

Delegates from CANAAC and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission (CANACOM) visited projects and engaged in discussions with Guyanese on issues such as poverty, race and gender-based violence.

They heard how small countries like Guyana, which have no place at international negotiating tables, suffer severe consequences and are squeezed out of their traditional local economic activities as a result of neoliberal economic globalization.

The Reformed leaders agreed at the meeting to engage a Caribbean consultant for WARC's Covenanting for Justice Project and to seek more ways to engage one another in collective action and theological reflection on economic

and ecological justice issues in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean.

CANAAC will also establish a youth network in the region to encourage involvement on issues such as leadership development, race, poverty and violence.

"This assembly has been a new beginning for CANAAC," said WARC President Clifton Kirkpatrick, who is stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA). There was tremendous energy among the delegates for making the theme, "Breaking the Chains," come alive in the Caribbean and in North America.

"Concrete strategies were set to build momentum around the WARC General Council's call in Accra to covenant for justice in the economy and the earth. Meeting in Guyana, it was evident for all why this call to justice is so critical for the life of the churches and the society."

Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, executive secretary for WARC's Office for Church Renewal, Justice and Partnership, added: "This opportunity for Caribbean and North American people to connect with each other's stories through listening, sharing, analyzing and hearing how people survive in these tough times is a tremendous gift and a significant step forward for the covenanting for justice process."

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) brings together 75 million Reformed Christians in 214 churches in 107 countries — united in their commitment to making a difference in a troubled world. The WARC general secretary is Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana. WARC's secretariat is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

David Lee *continued from page 5*

David Lee: Starting in 1990, when all those changes I mentioned took root, all the churches in the nation began to grow, some more, some less, but all experienced numerical growth. Our church also grew, but gradually there's been a leveling out and now we're experiencing real — integral, not just numerical — growth. We haven't seen huge numerical growth, but we have developed greatly in organization, leadership training, and financial management.

It's important to highlight something else that has done great harm, which is the flight and loss of leaders to emigration. This has restricted greater establishment of the church and we can't count on the leaders we need to reach the goals we set every year. In point of fact, the US policy in regard to Cuba — intended to damage the nation — has doubtless damaged the church, as well. Although the CRC in Cuba isn't large, it is well known and respected by the other churches, pastors, the Council of Churches, organizations, institutions and, of

course, by the government here in Jaguey, where the main office of the CRC is located.

CC: Explain some of the programs that the CRC is involved in.

David Lee: Right now the CRC in Cuba is involved primarily in three areas. The first area is Christian education, including preparation of lesson materials for all the churches — for children of all ages, youth, adults, and prayer services, as well as leadership training. The second area is diaconal work — social assistance projects such as lunch and dinner programs Mondays through Fridays for seniors who don't have family support or whose pensions aren't adequate; laundry service for seniors or very needy people; and sustainable loan projects for disabled persons.

The third area is evangelism — a large project to evangelize "in and out of season" so the Lord will add those to his church who must be saved.

CC: What are some of the challenges that face

the Cuban CRC today? What challenges face its youth, specifically?

David Lee: The greatest challenge facing the CRC today is evangelism. In second place is the need to make a difference in our society. These are big challenges. Youth is also important, since there are so many choices and temptations. Here all young people may study for a career or profession in which they have to do certain things that demand that they work hard, maybe in a better place with better pay.

CC: What has it been like for you as a couple to live in a society that has oppressed the church?

David Lee: It has always been a challenge for my wife, Haydee, and me to serve the Lord in the best way possible with surrender, passion, and commitment, always without considering the salary, the place, the conditions, recognition, and without demanding changes. In a society like ours where the Communist Party — similarly to the church — wants the best for every person and every citizen, it's

difficult to live humbly and to be examples as citizens, parents, families, and workers in attitude and in life.

I believe that to be witnesses of Christ is a challenge for every Christian everywhere. I believe this has many implications, and one of them is to not be able to keep silent in the face of injustice, lies, and shoddy quality.

CC: In what ways do you work along-side other Christian churches?

David Lee: We've had the blessing of becoming known among all the religious leaders. Our church especially has had the privilege of having pastors work voluntarily in the Council of Church of Cuba that groups together with more than twenty-two churches or different denominations. We also relate to many churches that don't belong to the Council. We have served and helped alongside them, which has resulted in good relationships with all — including the Catholic Church in the municipality.

Church

China Christian exile says religious freedom is an Olympic year blip

Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI) – The government in Beijing needs to turn into reality what it says about religious freedom, says Chinese pastor, Rev. Bob Fu, founder of the Texas-based China Aid Association and once a member of an underground house church in China.

At the Library of Congress in Washington DC in early February, Fu was presented with the 2007 John Leland Religious Liberty Award of the Southern Baptist Convention. He now lives in Texas where the Baptist church has a strong following. Despite living in exile from his home country, Fu sees a great future for Christianity in China.

“It’s a great encouragement to millions of the persecuted faithful in China knowing that over 16 million Southern Baptists are willing to stand up with them for freedom,” Fu told ENI in a telephone interview.

At its Web site, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention said that Fu was honoured “for courageously defending the right of all people to exercise freely their religious faith”.

“Chinese Christians need to stand up and fight for their rights, while the international community should give help, such as advocacy,” for the rights of Chinese Christians, said Fu, who was once imprisoned for two months with his wife for activities related to his faith.

Concerning religious freedom in China in 2008, Fu noted, “It may decrease a little, in terms of cases of persecution, given the Olympic diplomacy and image-making gestures.” These efforts had triggered in him a desire that the statements about religious freedom of the Chinese leadership would be translated into genuine policy instead of being temporary diplomatic manoeuvres.

“I am very hopeful and optimistic for the future of the Christian faith in China. And I think eventually in the next two decades or so, China will become a world Christian hub for the 21st century,” Fu told ENI.

Fu fled China to the United States, via Hong Kong in 1996. He then founded the China Aid Association, which closely monitors China’s human rights violations against house-church Christians, in 2002.

In February, the aid association released its 2007 annual report of persecution on Christian house churches in mainland China. It said “the escalation of persecution of house churches in 2007 and the worsening of human rights conditions is possibly an effort of ‘clearance’ before the Beijing Olympics.” However, “In January [2008] we see the Chinese reducing the level of persecution ostensibly on Christians...this is in preparation for the eyes of the world to see China favourably.” The report notes, “Concern is that in 2009, after the Beijing Olympics, persecution on churches and Christians will escalate and the human rights condition will seriously worsen.”

The report said that it recorded 60 cases of persecution in 2007, up 30.4 percent from that of 2006, and the total number of people persecuted was 788 in 2007, up 18.5 percent from 2006. The report said there were persecutions against house church leaders, Christian publications and foreign Christians and missionaries.

In 1989, during his student days in Beijing, Fu joined the Tiananmen democracy movement, and he said he was led to Jesus the same year. By 1992, he was the pastor of a house church and he started a Bible school years later. He and his wife were imprisoned for two months for their religious activities in 1996.

Orissa religious violence spotlights caste tensions and evangelists

Kristine Greenaway

New Delhi (ENI) – Recent religious conflict in the Indian state of Orissa has been aided by the aggressive evangelising of missionaries from outside the region, says an official with the largest traditional Protestant denomination in northern India. The roots of the tension lie in concerns about the conversion of Hindus to Christianity and in a long-simmering dispute about the rights and benefits granted to Christian converts under India’s caste system, the Rev. Enos das Pradhan, general secretary of the Church of North India, said in a recent interview with ENI. An upsurge in evangelisation by missionaries from overseas and from southern India has further inflamed tensions in the area, said Pradhan.

In December 2007, a violent confrontation in Orissa’s Kandhamal district, between Christians and members of a Hindu group, opposed to conversion, set off a wave of retaliation that resulted in extensive damage to the property of Christians at a time they were celebrating the holy feast of Christmas.

Concerns about Christian evangelisation in Orissa date back to the 1970s when anti-conversion legislation was passed by the state. People wishing to convert to Christianity must apply to district authorities for approval to be baptised or face a fine or imprisonment. Since then seven other states have passed similar legislation. The laws in each state seek to set conditions for conversion, but penalties imposed in the form of the loss of economic and education rights following conversion vary.

Indians of lower castes, now known as Dalits, were reported to have been the targets of much of the violence in Orissa. India has affirmative action legislation which reserves access to some government jobs and education opportunities for people from economically or socially marginalised castes. Christian Dalits have, however,

historically been denied these “reservation” rights on the basis that as Christians they are free from discrimination based on the Hindu caste system.

India’s 160 million Dalits represent one seventh of the country’s population. Fears that proposals to extend affirmative action benefits to Dalit Christians would make it more attractive to convert have led Hindus to resist proposals to extend “Reservation” rights to Dalit converts. Further complicating the situation, people known as Tribals in Orissa who convert to Christianity are allowed to retain their affirmative action “reservation” rights. Dalits and Tribals account for nearly 75 per cent of all converted Christians in India.

Indian-born communication rights specialist Pradip Thomas, a professor at the University of Queensland in Australia, said the presence of external evangelists has contributed to the rise in militant anti-conversion efforts by Hindu organisations such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. “Missionaries from South India are involved in ‘spiritual warfare’ using the media and Christian networks,” Thomas said.

With the rise in religious intolerance fuelled by Hindu extremists and Christian evangelists, there are also fears that freedom of religion in India is under attack. Human Rights Watch urged both Hindu and Christian leaders to work toward peaceful reconciliation, warning that India’s secular identity is at risk.

“The challenge facing the Christian Church in India today is to learn how to live as strong Christians in a pluralistic society,” Pradhan says. “Sixty years after Indian independence, the future of secularism is at stake.”

∴ Christianity, with about 26 million adherents, accounts for about 2.3 percent of India’s 1.1 billion people. It is the country’s third-largest religion, following Hinduism and Islam. Judaism arrived in India about 2500 years ago.



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Corinthians

The resurrection as a new fact in the world of mankind

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 1 Corinthians 15:13

A. A. van Ruler

At first glance, it seems as if in this line of argument the apostle Paul includes Christ's resurrection as one among many instances of a general rule. After all, he reasons as follows: If there is no resurrection of the dead in general – because it is impossible, ludicrous or also unnecessary – then Christ, too, has not arisen.

The flipside of this reasoning is this thought: The fact that Christ did rise from the dead implies that a general resurrection of the dead is also possible and that it does occur.

With this line of reasoning, Paul is operating on a purely human, logical and earthly level. Unlike many contemporary theologians, he does not appear to be afraid of doing this. The theologians are quick to cry that to take things literally and earthly is to fall into the error of fundamentalism. In contrast, they like to point to the unique and special character of Christ's preaching, of his resurrection, and of the living Lord.

All these are portrayed as being so unique and special that we are tempted to ask whether they are still real. We can emphasize the special character of the facts of salvation so much that they are in danger of losing their factuality. Then the things of the Kingdom of God become so elevated and so deep that in the long run they no longer have much to do with this concrete world in space and time.

A strong wind of unwordliness has often blown through modern Protestantism. In contrast, it is important to pay attention to how concretely and soberly Paul speaks of these things. He completely aligns Christ with the general rule that applies to all humanity. He does this twice. First in verse 13 of our chapter and then in verse 16 in slightly different words: "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either."

Paul goes even a bit further in his concrete reasoning. He not only includes Christ under the general rule for all humanity, but he also stretches it out to appear ridiculous.

For this is really the point he wants to make: If there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, if that can't happen in God's world regime, then Christ has not arisen. But this is a ridiculous notion, for Christ's resurrection is the life-giving foundation of the Christian church. Its reality is the content of the tradition. And this content has come to you through preaching. And you accepted this preaching in faith. And it is in this faith that you stand. You live by it. And in this way Christ's resurrection – the risen Christ himself – makes his life-giving power felt among you. All of these are also facts: tradition, preaching, the church, faith, the redeemed life.

The Christian church is another one of those worldly facts that we can take hold of. We must not speak of the church in too unworldly and too unrealistic, in too spiritual and ethereal terms. This happens in virtually all of Protestantism. As a church we are almost ashamed of ourselves and would efface ourselves as much as possible – at least as a real factor in the world.

This is definitely not the tone set by the New Testament. Paul, at any rate, allows the denial of the resurrection to run dead into the reality of the church, which lives out of Christ's resurrection.

Nevertheless, the content of Paul's argument gradually turns under our hands. For he doesn't just reason from the general rule to the particular instant, and from the special instant to the general rule. He does not just say: Christ's resurrection is a fact and this gives rise to the general rule that in God's world-regime the resurrection of the dead does occur. He also argues from the results to the cause. He also says: Christ's resurrection is the beginning and the breakthrough of the ultimate salvation God intends for the whole of creation. The one, thus, includes the other. In the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the dead is also concealed. Christ's resurrection is the sign, the beginning, the origin and the ground of the resurrection of the dead.

There is not just a general rule that God raises people from the dead, and then the raising of Christ from the dead is a special instance of this general rule. No, there is a primal fact, an unprecedented event, a saving act of God: Christ is raised from the dead!

This is the victory over sin and death, the victory over all that has corrupted God's good



Resurrection, from 'The Great Passion' series, 1510 by Albrecht Dürer

and beautiful creation. And from this victory flow another. The resurrection of Christ is a gesture of the Redeemer God by which he waves his and over all graveyards and over the entire world and all of life, over all that is on its way to destruction.

Christ's resurrection included the whole of the final salvation of the world. And this is essential to Christ's resurrection. It cannot be left out. We cannot take his resurrection by itself, for it has saving significance. It is substitutionary. It is prophetic. It is the seed that contains the resurrection of all who become bound to him in faith. This is why when we deny the resurrection of the dead we also deny Christ's resurrection.

This is not in the first place because of the relationship between the general rule and the special instance, but it is due to the nature of Christ's resurrection. We can confess it only by being overcome by the immeasurable joy at what God intends for mankind and for the world.

Christ's resurrection stands as a fact at the beginning. By it our eyes are opened to the resurrection of the body as a fact at the end. But in between come a whole series of facts.

I've already spoken of the tradition of the apostolic church, about the preaching of the apostolic gospel, and about the work of the Spirit that – through this tradition and through the preaching of the Word – awakens faith in human hearts and thence the joyful life of the church. We must not forget these.

There is not just resurrection at the beginning and at the end. There is also the power of the resurrection in the middle, in the present. It consists in that we live it and freely embrace the reality of day to day in love and joy.

Stewardship

MANY EASTER BLESSINGS

Richard Oostra

While retail outlets are promoting bunnies and Easter baskets we as believers, however, must join millions of Christians around the world in celebrating Christ's death and triumphant resurrection. Yes, Good Friday and Easter go together.

Good Friday speaks of Christ's supreme sacrifice when one man paid a debt he didn't owe, because we had a debt we couldn't pay, so that we may have peace with God.

Easter speaks of new life

Like old bulbs become flowers again, so our old bodies one day become new again on that great resurrection morning, as the bible says:

"If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation" I Cor 5:17

Easter is the cornerstone of the Christian faith

The Christian religion is the only religion that has a founder who died for his followers and rose again.

If Christ had not risen our faith would be in vain. (I Cor 15:13)

Easter did not come by chance

Jesus all along proclaimed that he was the Resurrection and the source of Life. (John 11:25) He even told those who would crucify him that they could tear down his temple, but that in three days he would rise again.

Easter was God's secret weapon

The death and resurrection of Christ are described in the bible as the Secret of all ages.

"We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began"

I Cor 2:6

Had Satan understood the consequences of crucifying Christ, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (vs. 8)

Easter demands identification

The key in celebrating the resurrection of our Lord is to know that we, as believers, learn to die to our old 'self' and become more and more spiritually risen to newness of life in Christ. The apostle Paul said it so well when he wrote:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" Gal 2:20

Easter means power

To have come to this stage in our journey takes time, but it must be the most inner desire for us to say with the message of Easter in mind:

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above,

where Christ is ...Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and you

life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" Col 3:1,2

**Have a
Blessed
Easter!**



Day 2 – Sky

On the second day of creation, God took the steamy vapour and separated water from water. The chaos and heat of an unformed earth was cooled so that water vapour cooled to form water that separated itself from the vapours above it. This expanse contains the vapours of water, nitrogen, carbon dioxide and many other gases that form the atmosphere that we call sky. Clouds of congregated water vapour form in our sky and are cooled again to drop water on the earth in a continuous water cycle. This cycle is crucial to the life of all the plants and creatures that God would create on the next few days.

The sky and the water cycle are critical to our life support. Each day scientists make new discoveries and collect data that records how human activity is impacting this cycle – the impact on our skies of air pollution, increased ozone levels, and even the effect of aircraft vapour trails. Science, though still challenged and denied by many, is quite insistent that human activity is impacting our global climate. Each year, the water cycle seems to be getting wilder; we see greater swings of famine and flood and expanding desertification, the reduction of polar ice-caps and glaciers, and increasing incidences of extreme weather (tornadoes and typhoons) and much flooding. The melting icecaps cause rising sea levels, and, as the levels of carbon dioxide in our skies continue to rise, the melting and rising waters worsen. The warming of our global climate has reduced the amount of water stored in the form of ice in the glaciers and icecaps. As more ice melts it becomes part of the active water/weather cycle that we experience each day. This may have both beneficial and negative impacts.

As image bearers of God, we are stewards of the sky. No longer can we just exhaust things into the sky – polluting the air we need for life. No longer should we allow oil wells to simply exhaust their 'sour gases' into the air, nor should we simply dissipate our waste by uncontrolled burning. Nor should we allow our factories, vehicles and planes to contaminate the air we breathe. The solution is not in accommodation (such as the donning of our own personal facemasks). Rather, as Christians, we need to take our stewardship of the sky seriously, and become leaders in strategies that will clean up the air we breathe. We need to strive for systems of transportation, industry and power consumption that honour the creation God has made. We need to be leading the way by advocating for better stewardship of our skies – not simply by being critics but also by becoming active in developing solutions that work towards restoring a healthy atmosphere for all of God's creatures.

Due to the greater awareness of the impact of CO₂ gas in our skies, new approaches to the use of coal are already being tested. Consider the joint effort between the State of North Dakota and the Province of Saskatchewan where a coal gasification project

pipes the CO₂ to Saskatchewan where it is pumped into vast underground oil bearing layers instead of being simply being exhausted into the sky. It is basically putting the carbon back from whence it came. As Christians we need to be busy finding solutions that honour the systems that God put in place in this world. We need to be in the business of restoration! I personally believe that taking a 'hands off' approach is not the Christian steward's way!

What can you do? First of all, learn more and use your collective voice to advocate for 'sky friendly' solutions to our energy needs. In places where water use is abused or misused (large scale mining, tar sands) **pressurize** industry to stop abusing water as a 'free' resource or the sky as an easy dumping ground for unwanted gaseous byproducts. Advocate for better-integrated systems that take full responsibility for by-products, and then be willing to pay the extra cost to make it happen. It also means making personal choices that reflect better and reduced water utilization – so that you do not contribute to the excesses prevalent today! For instance, it could be as simple as buying an electric mower instead of a gas powered one (notoriously bad polluters). Much has been done to clean up the air – mankind is making progress. As Christian stewards let's be leaders in encouraging better stewardship of our skies!

Stewardly tip: water consumption. Toilets that flush with less water, wash machines that clean with less water, low volume shower heads, washing the car at home (using a mitt and a bucket of mild soapy water and then rinse) and percolation garden watering are just some of the measures available to reduce water usage. Water is a precious resource – even in Canada where we have plenty!

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Day 3 – Land

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Art



My wife and I have been delighted and surprised by many cards, letters and phone calls from CC readers, especially over the last few months. Some send us homemade cards, but we've never received one quite like the one we received from Joanne and Syd Sysma last week.

It is a work of art. In fact, it is several works of art in miniature. As you see from

the pictures, the card, stitched together with colorful thread, opens like an accordion. Inside, the bottom legend carrying the poem also acts like a small envelope to hold six small watercolours illustrating the words of the poem.

But that's not all. The other side is just as colorful: three abstract pieces are flanked by two blazing sunflowers.

I was reminded of a book that I bought for my father many years ago by Jan Overduin. It was called *God's Big Surprise*. In it Overduin unwraps Jesus' astonishing painting of the Kingdom, especially in the Beatitudes. The card, this little packet of art, was such a surprise: a wholly unexpected gift sparkling with anticipation of that now and coming King-

dom. That's one of the gifts of our creativity and our art; they can intuit and reveal some of the features of that big surprise in store for us – and for those with eyes to see already here around us.

We thought this little surprise package too good to keep to ourselves, so we share it here with you.



Like the roots of a strong oak
God is under our feet.

Like the gentle rain falling
God's love is filling our hearts.



Like the stars in the night sky
God is over our heads.

Like the wings of an eagle,
We open our arms to care for this world.



Like the sun on the horizon
God is ever before us.

Like the river runs to the ocean,
We know that our home is in God.



Poem by Keri Wehlender - from *Like a Rock*.

Keri Wehlender (from *Like a Rock*)

Nature

Looking around:
perchance to
praise

Although we live in the Bulkley Valley surrounded by mountains, forests, and alpine meadows, I confess to a cordial hatred for hiking. Tonight, in fact, we are visiting with a fellow retired schoolteacher who could walk my legs right down to stumps in short order were I so daring as to go on a hike with her.

When it comes to looking out windows, however, I think that I can say that I excel. Throwing modesty to the breeze, I'll also brag that I'm really, really good at walking slowly, and peering at things.

Many of my bird photos have been taken through our windows, with most of the rest taken on my less-than-arduous walks down the lane, through the field, or out to the back pond.

I'm also a great believer in looking out car windows. (This causes my wife some angst if I'm driving.) Today I saw two bald eagles doing some sort of courtship flight. Once I saw a sharp-shinned hawk chasing house sparrows on Main Street in Smithers. That was fascinating, although the people in the cars behind me at the four-way stop didn't appreciate my stationary car.

Not too many days ago I drove my car the 100 metres up the lane to our pond in order to give the dog sprinting practice. Half-way there I spotted an owl. Caring a lot for Chester, the Wonder Dog, and his cardio-vascular fitness, I finished my drive and his run, turned around, went to the house, got the camera, drove back down the lane and photographed the rather rare – for this area – barred owl from the front seat of the car.

I'm not sure how it develops, but the ability to look around and see what's actually there is a rewarding skill. My daughter, Rebecca, studying at Memorial University in St. John's sent me a poem recently about the goldeneye ducks she sees on a local pond. . . ducks that others seemingly don't see, or else dismiss with the comment, "Oh, there's a duck."

Information received too late
to include in the column called
"Suicide Birds:

. . . Birds are unique among animals in that their skeletons are so divided into two distinct locomotory modules. The front half is heavily developed for attachment of the massive flight muscles and the rear half less so (except in birds like ostriches) as its function is for walking and control of the tail. The interface between these two modules is the lumbar region of the spine and this has been called the Achilles' heel of avian design. For forest birds especially, this region is quite weak as they rarely have to contend with the twisting forces produced by strong winds (and nothing is wasted in bird design as they have to get airborne).

Before the advent of the semi-trailer and motor car it wasn't a problem for them. The birds that are killed on the roads are not usually killed by direct impact or by being run over. Their reaction time is too quick for that. It is the wind blast that twists their bodies and snaps this lumbar region. Birds that have been autopsied show massive internal bleeding in this region where the dislocated backbone has ruptured the blood vessels near the kidneys.

*This information courtesy of master birder
Mel Coulson of Quick, B.C., based on Gary
Kaiser's excellent new book, The Inner Bird.*

These particular ducks are quite interesting. They are diving ducks, with feet set back on their bodies to help them in underwater swimming. Diving ducks, e.g., goldeneyes, need to flap and "run" across the surface of the water to get into flight, unlike mallards, black ducks, pintails, teal, etc., which can simply "jump" into the air from either land or water.

"Us dabblers dunk to dine, while we divers dive" is an alliterative jingle to help remember that leg placement and feeding habits are also related.

"Becca's" golden eye could conceivably be a Barrow's or a common golden eye. She'll have to check. Either way, however, if she heard them fly she could identify them as goldeneyes by the whistling wings.

Incidentally "Becca's" goldeneyes are underappreciated residents of Burton Park, so my other daughter suggests we describe them as living, "On Burton Pond." If Henry Fonda could be resurrected there might be a movie in that title.

Becca may have her goldeneyes, but I have mine, too. Every day people drive past Eddy Park in the tiny town called Telkwa, British Columbia. I can usually spot some ducks on the Bulkley River from Highway 16 as I putt along through town. When I was teaching school, I noticed that many of the students never saw those ducks from their school bus or family vehicle, so I made it a point to get them to look out windows. (I called it a life skill: a "unit" on



looking out windows.)

In the spring and summer, one can see common mergansers on the river almost daily. Once I spotted a Bonaparte's gull floating downstream, and several times a I saw a dipper: a lovely slate gray bird that "walks" underwater looking for insects.

This winter the river was mostly frozen except for a few stretches of rushing rapids. In those rapids lived "my" goldeneyes. A drake and two hens. I don't know what crustaceans they could find to eat in that short stretch of open water. But they must be getting food, because paddling is necessary just to stay still unless they crawl up on the ice, a rock or find an eddy.

Learning to see, learning to hear, learning to notice – these skills take time. Rushing just won't do when it comes to observation. Nor will video, computer, or television. It is one's own eyes, one's own ears (think of a mechanic who listens to an engine and says, "needs rings"), one's own perceptions that need honing. Busy-ness is the enemy of perception, in my opinion.

I cultivate stillness, not as spiritual discipline, but as perceptual training. I also figure that I'd better get good at staring out windows if I don't want to spend my retirement years looking at a big-screen TV at the Bulkley Lodge. When I move to that retirement home, I hope someone will help me set up a bird feeder, a small garden or window box, and regularly wash the windows.

So I can look. Perchance to see. To appreciate. And to praise. . . without conscious thought, if necessary.

An eddy, Eddy Park. . . Just about the time I was feeling quite cocky about being able to "see" things that others miss, I was reminded that I don't always do so well with the process of thought. When I first drove past Eddy Park about 20 years ago, I wondered how it got its name. My first explanation: "Why would they name a park after the Eddy Match Company?" I went on to thinking, "Maybe it's named after a local historical figure," sort of like naming Surrey Memorial Hospital after the philanthropist, Mr. Memorial. No kidding: it took me some time to connect the big swirling pool with the eddy of Eddy Park

*Curt Gesch spends his retirement judging
4-H speeches, serving on the board of
Calvin Theological Seminary, serving as
a regional advocate for the Disabilities
Concerns for the Christian Reformed
Church, and looking out windows.*



Ducks and
Underappreciated
Beauty
("On Burton Pond")

In the simple
Thin, vague, discreet
Crouching
Holding breath
Escaping notice
All but mine

Hidden pleasures
Joys, hope, promise
Steeling
Bracing for...
No, revelling here
In fullness

Whipping wind swirls
Prods, laps, pesters
Teasing
Singing in flight
A gliding feather
Comes to rest

Why is it
They ignore you
Eyes with blinders
Passing
Looking on
But never seeing
What I see

Why is it
I can see you
Calm, smooth,
vibrant
Gliding
Chuckling
Ordinary, yet
Not to me

Rebecca E. Gesch

Challenges

Life, death, faith
and questions

My window seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

I enjoyed a vibrant, healthy, loving relationship with Marisa. We were married relatively young. I was 24 and Marisa was 23. We were kids. What did we know about committing the rest of our life to each other after only knowing each other for 3 years? It was a leap of faith. Marrying early can uncover different things. One can either mature alongside with the other or grow up and realise those differences that can lead to separation.

Marisa and I grew up together. When she was broken I helped her heal. When I was broken, she was there to mend me. For us our lives together were the perfect balance between depending on each other and independence. We matured into adulthood together.

Now we are apart. For a brief time.

Shortly after Marisa died, I prayed often. I prayed for our children. I prayed that one day they will grow up, grow old and grow strong. I prayed that they will know who their mother is. I prayed that one day they will realise that even though they lost their mother to cancer at the ages of 5, 3, and 1, that they were protected. I prayed that when they are adults they will be able to testify that even though the disease of cancer took their mother away, they learned to grow from the experience.

Then I stopped praying for a while. I would put the kids to bed and try to find a healthy distraction. I considered praying but didn't have the energy or will. It was those days that I felt that I needed to be still with my thoughts. It was during those times that I wondered how I could continue loving and believing in a God who did not heal a 33-year-old mother of three here on earth. I questioned if I even wanted to.

It was during those days that I needed to be still and let God love me and believe in me.

I used to believe that my days would be lived and enjoyed as a chain of events that went from past to present to future. I believed that after Marisa and I were married, we would work for a period of time, then be blessed with children, work some more, retire and then watch our children grow old and have children of their own. I thought that one day I'd get creaky knees and ear hair but that those things would have to wait for a while. I expected that my relationships, health, employment and family would continue the same for much of my life with only predictable change in controllable amounts.

And we really must live that way. We must live like tomorrow will be there. We just need God's plan for our eternal future.

I don't know why cancer entered Marisa's body. I don't know why she had to leave three young children behind. I don't know why I'm left with such a hole in my identity. I don't know why I won't grow old with Marisa. I try and comprehend that this is part of an incalculable and better plan. But each time I try to comprehend it I fail.

So I choose to believe that our story and our situation achieve something. I believe that it will achieve something that I may or may not understand one day. I do know that when some parents heard about us, they hugged their children a bit longer and a bit more often. That is good. If a parent of a 6-year-old has more patience for their child because this parent is reminded of what a blessing it is to be healthy and alive for their children, then that is good. If a spouse comes home early to be with their family because they read about our story, then that is good.

And even though I don't comprehend why these things happened to us, I choose to believe that Marisa and my journey fits into a plan that is greater than I can ever imagine.

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with his three children.

Fasting on the 5th Sunday of the month

Daphne Simpkins

"Why don't we fast on the 5th Sunday of the month instead of having our usual brunch?" petite Fran Applewhite proposed. She stood up to speak so that the Sunday school class could see that she was serious.

It was a radical suggestion proposed by the woman who had introduced using cotton fingertip towels at ladies luncheons because they laundered more easily than linen ones. Fran was also in charge of table arrangements for fellowship suppers. She was an organizational genius about food. Anything to do with eating, Fran was the go-to expert. And now Fran was proposing that instead of the usual 5th Sunday brunch, the women of the Berean Sunday school class not eat at all – but fast instead. "Fast like they do in the Bible," Fran added for emphasis.

And then she sat down.

The Bereans understood the initial benefits of the proposed fast immediately. They wouldn't have to cook and carry food and then clean up afterwards. Further, a fast instead of a brunch wouldn't prevent a regular and proper Sunday lunch which could then occur guilt-free just two hours after the Sunday school hour when they could in very good conscience break the fast at home or at the Country Club where, not incidentally, bread pudding with warm whiskey sauce was offered. No one ever mentioned the bread pudding; everyone knew about it.

Impressed with Fran's ingenuity and intrigued by the idea of a radical change in church lady behavior, the class appeared to be resistant to the idea at first by a collective, thoughtful silence. This first quiet response that could have been mistaken as 'no' was really only a sensitive expression of courtesy just in case there was someone in their midst who really, really wanted to eat brunch on the 5th Sunday.

Time was allowed for this woman to speak up. When she didn't, Anne Henry, who was the local tennis champion and famous for her consistent volleys, rose and asked logically, "What are we going to do if we are not eating or having our regular Sunday school lesson?"

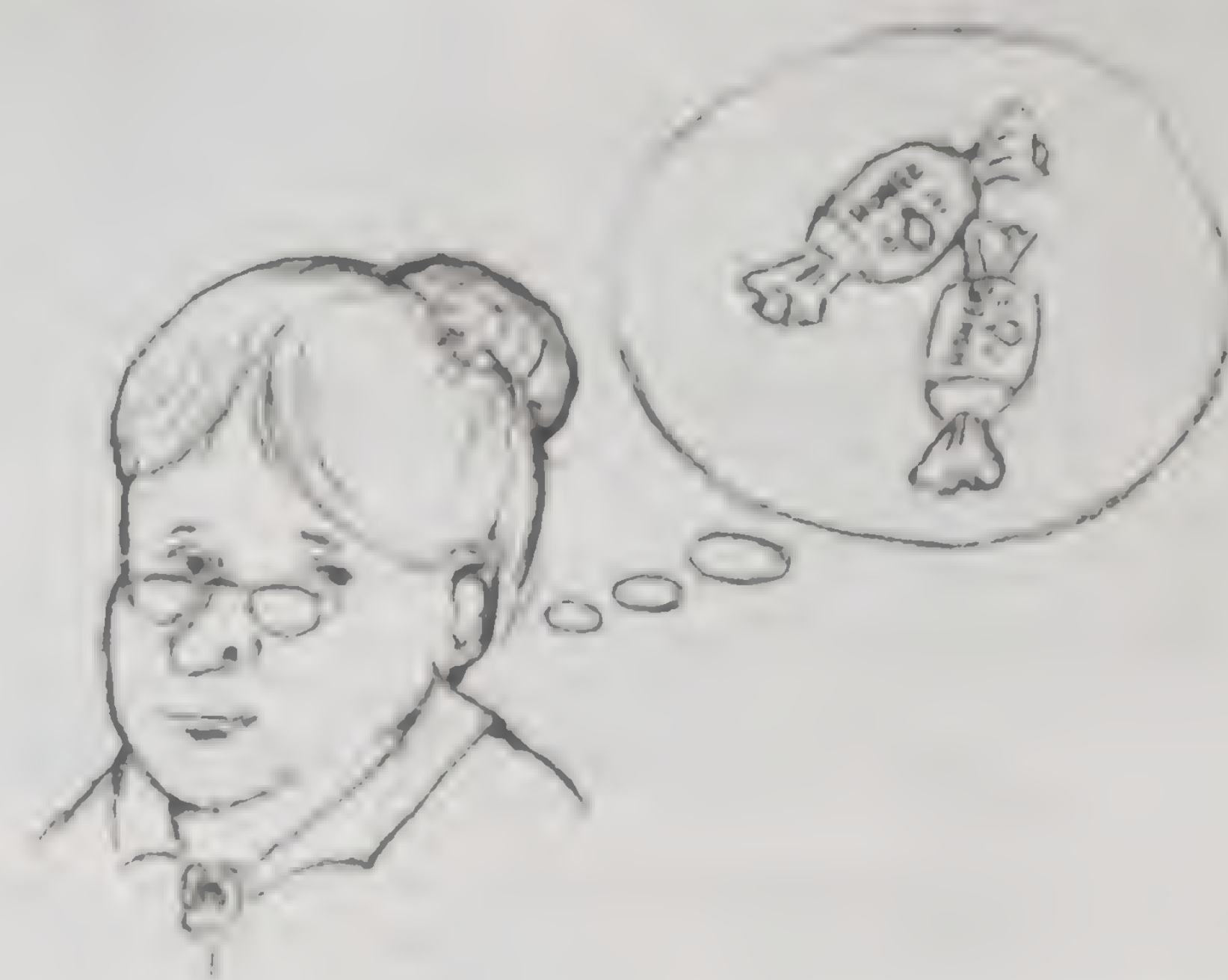
Mildred Budge had been waiting for this moment for some time. Inspired by her friend Fran's courage, she, too stood up, and proposed, "We could sing praises." Then, in a sudden fervor, Mildred added, "I always wish we could sing more."

"And we could drink glasses of ice water with lemon," Anne Henry suggested thoughtfully as the idea of not eating on the 5th Sunday began to take hold. "Singing makes me thirsty."

"Ice water with lemon can be very filling, too," the new president of the Sunday school class agreed with a gentle deference that was very becoming. Her humble tone was like the other women's voices in the class. For when women negotiate change, their plans often carry a tinge of mea culpa for thinking out loud.

"I take a diuretic for my blood pressure. I won't be drinking iced water with lemon," the former president of the class replied briskly.

And inappropriately. She had lost the election



ERIC G. ROBERTS

by a considerable margin to the new president, and refusing to drink a glass of water was a subtle way of expressing her hurt feelings.

"It's entirely optional," the new president replied gracefully, and the class breathed a sign of relief that she was going to be easy to get along with. The former president had been a bit contrary from time to time which she proved by asking aggressively, "Does this fast idea mean we can't eat breakfast at home?"

She looked expectantly at the new president to resolve this theological point, but Fran, who had initiated the discussion, rose protectively and took responsibility for creating the controversial situation.

"It does. Otherwise, you'll be spending your regular Sunday school time just not eating brunch, which is what most of us do anyway on the other Sundays of the month, except for those honey-filled drops that have 20 calories a piece in them that Mildred Budge gives us."

Mildred Budge did not know why Fran brought up the Honees, but Fran was most likely more nervous than she appeared and so had just rambled on thoughtlessly without realizing that she was in a way setting up Mildred to be criticized for what had always been considered the virtue of generosity.

With a liquid honey center and imported from Italy, Honees were extra special – the perfect piece of church lady candy. "I buy Honees by the case," Mildred confessed recklessly. It was both a confession and a boast. Mildred Budge recognized that paradox in herself and determined to repent.

As Mildred made that resolution, Fran nodded significantly at her best friend – that familiar quiet glance of friendship that translated, 'I don't know why I just said that; sorry.'

Mildred smiled with understanding, desperately wanted a Honee, but resisted the impulse to reach for one.

Naturally the minds of Mildred's friends, the Bereans, roamed to John the Baptist and his eating of locusts and honey. Though they were not fasting yet, they were all wondering if they could worm a Honee out of Mildred with a slight cough some time between that very moment and the next 5th Sunday. Then they would have a Honee safely stored in their purses just in case this not eating on the 5th became a desperate situation.

Challenges

Reading the growing tension among them, Fran stood up again and made another radical suggestion. "Let's pray on the 5th Sunday. Fast if you want to; don't fast if you don't want to! But let's pray when we get here," Fran said.

"Pray the whole time?" the former president asked snappishly. "For a whole hour?"

The whine in her voice caused the new president to stand again, this time assuming the position of protective authority that was expected of an elected leader. "If we run out of things to pray about, we'll start singing Mildred's hymns," the new president suggested diplomatically. And then before the situation could get worse, she announced with finality, "That's what we'll do the next 5th Sunday then. Bring your prayer lists from home."

Change had happened. Worrisome, challenging change. Already the individual women could feel the tension created by giving up a routine and in the giving up confirmed their collective desire for spiritual growth.

But would she have to pray out loud? Or would only those ladies who were comfortable praying out loud do the work for them all?

They were scared – but come the 5th Sunday of the month, there was an unusual show of attendance and feeling hungry and disoriented, the women, some with stomachs that didn't usually start growling till the preacher started to speak an hour later, attempted to muffle the sounds by hurriedly drinking ice water with lemon provided by the new president. Then, one by one – standing to pray – and with less apology in their voices than usual, they began to open their mouths and confess a need for God and his providential care that was deeper than their 10-minute prayer routine usually allowed before the once regularly scheduled 5th Sunday brunch.

They prayed without ceasing. They prayed for the salvation of souls for nieces and nephews and neighbors they confessed they didn't like. They asked God to help them love their neighbors as themselves. Tears fell.

The new president petitioned for increased learning and patience toward one another. Her voice broke. The former president passed her a Kleenex.

Then, Anne Henry urged good sportsmanship among the sisters.

Fran interceded for mercy.

Mildred Budge thought of the whiskey sauce on the bread pudding at the Country Club five times before she finally stood up and prayed, "Give us Lord our daily bread, and let us be truly grateful." She meant it.

Yes, the fast, like most of Fran's ideas, was a great move toward something that was hard to define: holiness.

The ladies felt a hunger to pray that they had not known before and a strange desire to give up different types of food ministries that had felt (though they hadn't stopped before to talk about it) sometimes like busy work rather than real help that was really needed, and occasionally food projects seemed to be a catalyst for unrelenting weight gains.

Delighted that they could be challenged and change, the Berean church ladies agreed to not eat together again on the next 5th Sunday of a month. And as they passed Mildred Budge, they stifled both real and nervous coughs while Mildred wrestled with the temptation of not reaching into her purse.

Mildred Budge did not give out any Honees that day nor would she ever again on any 5th Sunday of any month. It was for her a different kind of fast – a personal response to a personal challenge. Like any call to radical self-discipline, not giving out candy was strange at first for Mildred Budge, then liberating; and ultimately, the small shift in her thinking felt undeniably right.

Eating my words

Angela Dick

March-ing as to War

It's been a snowy winter in Barrie. The weather has given kids and teachers nine days off school so far – a local record. Snow has drifted over the distinguishing features of each house on our street, making it hard to find the right driveway. We used to give directions that included the six-foot hedge on our front lawn, but that hasn't really been visible since November.

We share a driveway with our neighbours – the ones, if you recall, I tried unsuccessfully to have over for dinner last December. After being turned down a few times, I kind of gave up. Maybe they felt as awkward as I did. After all, people don't really socialize with their neighbours anymore. An apartment building in Toronto, for example, made a website to help its renters communicate. Why bother talking to anyone when you can post a complaint or notice online?

On one terrifically snowy day a few weeks ago, the whole city stuttered to a halt. At noon, you could still see several men with heavy coats over suit jackets busy digging out their cars, determined to drive *somewhere*. A few raggedy armies of boys marched along the unplowed road, shovels resting on shoulders, hoping to earn money.

It doesn't feel like an exaggeration to use "army" in relation to how we end up thinking of the snow – by March, at least. Pick any garage on our street and you'll see a tidy line of at least three kinds of snow removal tools: a small shovel for the front porch and sidewalk; a wide scoop for the driveway; and a sharp metal pick for breaking up stubborn ice, which is then carted away by the scoop. You may also find yourself needing a medium-sized shovel, for clearing the three-foot sludge pile that the city plow deposits at the end of your driveway (just after you cleared it with the scoop), or for when your small shovel breaks. You can also get a special extension shovel with a perpendicular metal head to scrape heavy, melting snow off your roof. The crazy-looking so-called ergonomically-correct shovels are optional. I'd also recommend a long-handled broom for clearing your car. And maybe a metal detector, for finding it.

By the end of winter, these shovels are no longer tools. They are weapons. You've scoured Canadian Tire for the latest models and then hung them neatly on your garage wall with all the seriousness of a soldier preparing for war. Neighbours might find themselves striking an alliance to deal with the common enemy. Especially if, between houses, there's a shared war-zone such as a double driveway.

Thankfully, our neighbour has a snow-blower. That certain snowy day, though, he had to borrow a shovel to dig the blower out of his shed. It was late in the afternoon by the time he systematically chugged up and down the entire driveway, finishing off our weakening attempts to shift the knee-deep snow. I was so grateful that I rushed outside on an impulse and invited him and his wife, once more, over for dinner. This time they came.

"If you spend yourselves in behalf of the

hungry . . . then your light will rise in the darkness," says Isaiah (58:10). Could this be an antidote to feeling tired of winter? Beth Moore, a Christian writer and speaker, brought this verse to my attention; she says that if we break out of the prison of our self-absorption by serving others, the light of God's love will shine in the darkness like the sun. And if there's one thing we need a little more of in this season, it's the noon-day sun.

Winter is almost over. In fact, my niece worked out a math problem last week; decoded, it read: "Spring is coming."

"Oh good!" she exclaimed, "I was wondering."

By now, school kids aren't counting on more days off, and I'm hoping that our neighbour can retire his snow-blower soon. Despite how long winter might seem, it's the same every year, a local farmer said: January's dark but February's sunny, and – by March – his cattle can find grass again. I noticed that his voice lost a little steam, however, when he glanced out the window and saw the stubborn piles of snow still left. He might have muttered something then about buying hay.

This afternoon, I delivered three chocolate zucchini loaves along with a thank-you card to the 45 employees who plow Barrie's city streets and sidewalks. After all, they've had an intense year too. *The Operations Department: Snow Removal Division* seemed grateful for the gesture – "Usually, nobody comes over here unless it's to complain," one woman said. I found myself squinting when I walked outside to the car. The sun seemed just a little brighter.

Chocolate zucchini loaf

2 ½ c. flour
½ c. unsweetened cocoa
1 ½ tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. salt

Mix dry ingredients together. Set aside.

1 ½ c. sugar
3 eggs
½ c. unsweetened applesauce
½ c. vegetable oil
2 tsp. vanilla
2 c. zucchini (peeled, grated)
½ c. mini-chocolate chips (optional)

Beat sugar, eggs, applesauce, oil and vanilla together. Add zucchini and chocolate chips. Add dry ingredients; mix minimally.

Pour into two loaf pans.

¼ c. sliced almonds
Sprinkle almonds otop
Bake in preheated 350 C oven for 50 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before slicing.

Angela Reitsma Dick
lives in Barrie, Ontario
Send your interesting stories or
recipes to
ad_angels@hotmail.com



Reflections



Welcome to
my perch
Bert Witvoet

My facial hair is as a flock of goats

I don't like the picture anymore that has accompanied my column for the past years. First of all, it was dark and grainy. That's partly because the picture lacked definition, and partly because the paper used by CC absorbs a lot of ink. Secondly, I don't *look* like my former picture anymore. That's because I have grown a goatee. You can blame my wife for that if you think it looks ugly.

We were driving across Canada last summer when she suggested I let my hair on my chinny chin chin grow. As she sits beside me in the front seat, she can easily see my profile. It has always been more obvious to her than to me that I have a receding chin. I am used to looking at myself in the mirror straight on. In a mirror I don't look that bad. But from her unique perspective I lack a certain, *je ne sais quoi*... assertiveness or manliness? Everyone knows what a real man looks like: a strong chin that supports a squarish face, over which hangs a noble brow. Well, the Creator was out of all these ingredients temporarily when I was wrought in my mother's womb.

So now, to compensate for this deficiency, she suggested I resort to the old camouflage, hide-in-the-bush kind of trick. So I did. I grew a bush, also known as a goatee. If you have to fight a battle with your spouse, let it be over more important things like, "Whose turn is it to do the dishes?" or, "You said you cleaned the car." "No, I didn't." "Yes you did." "No I didn't." Goatees belong to the indifferent things in life, more or less on the level of food offered to idols – if you don't believe in idols it's alright to eat temple food. For me that would have to be mosque food, it being the nearest house of non-Christian worship, not counting the mall on Glendale Avenue here in St. Catharines.

Certain advantages

How do people react to my new look? Most of the people who know me and who see me with this undergrowth for the first time say it looks good on me. Some call me professorial-looking or simply dignified. I absorb all their compliments with utter humility, mostly because I know that they are glad that I no longer remind them that I have a receding chin. That's the nice thing about your fellow human beings: they feel embarrassed on your behalf. They all want you to look as good as they themselves, well, almost as good.

Actually, my goatee serves another purpose besides making me look handsome. When I am listening intently to a sermon or a speech, I find myself twisting the hairs between my fingers or slightly pulling on a whole tuft. It helps me to concentrate and it passes the time, too, when the sermon or speech lags a bit. Besides, these motions of my hand and fingers give me an even greater air of dignity and pensivity. When I am thus occupied I come close to portraying Rodin's statue The Thinker. You can

actually order a foot-high bronze replica of The Thinker for \$229.00. Maybe there's money in it for me. I should ask someone to sculpt me pulling on my goatee.

Gimme a break

Some people ask me if I have trouble keeping my goatee out of my porridge. That's a strange question to ask. I know, I know... as a former teacher I always say that there is no such thing as a foolish question, but this time I make an exception. The question is, in fact, a stupid question. First of all, I usually don't eat porridge. I prefer home-made granola with yoghurt. Secondly, I don't stick my face in a bowl when I eat. When you eat with a spoon, a moustache is more likely to become the recipient of an overflowing spoon of soup, for example, than a goatee. Okay, the other day I dribbled some spaghetti over my chin, but a quick wipe with a serviette made it look as if it never happened. In fact, it never happened. If anyone disputes this fact, I say with Roger Clemens that they "disremember."

As far as I know, none of my sons who sport a goatee complain about seepage during meals. That's right, three of my four sons have a goatee, maybe for the same reason that I do. Although I have to be careful here because some of them are quite creative about this whole thing. Hair today... gone tomorrow.

A cousin in Canada

The other day, I was looking at myself in the mirror, and a song came to my mind. It was a song my Dad used to sing when he was in a whimsical mood. I'll translate it into English for those who are Netherlandically-challenged.

*I have a cousin in Canada,
In the heartland of America,
Five meter tall,
Two meter thick,
A shabby old hat,
And a goatee schtick.
That is my cousin from Canada,
In the heartland of America.*

If my Dad were still alive and living in Holland, where he lies buried, he could change that to: "I have a son in Canada..." Of course, the bodily dimensions are a bit off, but for the rest it works. A goatee in Dutch is "een geitesik" – the beard of a goat, which is what a goatee means, too, come to think of it. Hmm. I don't know whether I like that idea. As a Christian I want to be on the side of the sheep, not the goats.

Nothing wrong with goats

But goats are noble animals. Did you know that goat's milk is more easily digestible and less allergic than cow's milk. Goats eat less and take up less grazing space than cows. In many parts of the world goat's milk is preferred to cow's milk. So why should I feel less worthy of respect for wearing a goatee?

My final defence comes from The Song of Solomon. The lover praises his beloved with sweet words: "How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh how beautiful!... Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead." Imagine my chin representing Mount Gilead. My wife is sitting next to me, looks sideways and suddenly bursts

out with: "How beautiful you are, my darling! Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead." To which I reply, "As for my receding chin, there is a balm in Gilead, sweetheart."

Crown of splendour

Okay, let's have a bit of realism inserted into the picture here. There is a drawback to this flock of goats. Facial hair tends to turn grey before the hair on your head does. So my goatee is fairly grey, much more so than what I comb on top of my head. But is that a problem at my age? I should be glad that at age 73 I still have a decent crop of hair at the top and the bottom of my head. Grey hair is a reminder of our mortality, which according to the preacher in Ecclesiastes helps us value life more. "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning." And for those who are less philosophically inclined, it's helpful to know that the reason hair turns grey is that the hair cells lack a certain pigment. Big deal.

I read in Proverbs 16:31 that "Grey hair is a crown of splendour; it's attained by a righteous life." "Crown of splendour": I like that. It's so affirming. It suits me to a "t." And "righteous," eh? Maybe my hair is not grey enough. Judging by the hair on top of my skull, I'm only 15 percent righteous. But the goatee brings up the average to a respectable 35 percent. For someone like me who started out being a totally depraved sinner that's nothing to sneeze at.

In case you think I am a bit vain about my looks, remember, it all started when my wife looked sideways, saw my unimpressive profile and uttered the fatal words: "Why don't you grow a goatee?" I had no comeback to that. Negative reasons are always harder to come by.

So let it be recorded in the annals of my family that I started growing a goatee the middle of August, 2007, when Stephen Harper was prime minister of Canada, Stephen Truscott was acquitted of murder, and we were staying at the house of our son, Stephen Witvoet. That's three Stephens to mark the occasion. A coincidence? "Stephen" means "crown." That has a royal connotation. I think I'll add that to the list of fictional comments about my goatee by some unknown person: "It makes you look regal."

And that's why I have asked the editor to change the picture that goes with my column. I hope you, reader, will be duly impressed with my regal appearance.



Bert Witvoet is the former editor of CC, now retired, who stays active by editing the Christian Educators Journal and preaching the occasional sermon. He tries to stay informed by hearing and reading the daily news and Reformed by looking for writers and speakers who can tell the forest from the trees.

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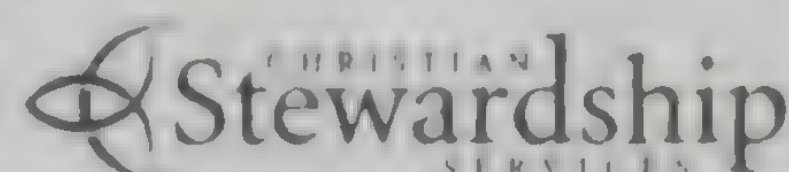
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DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: CC is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.

RATE: (GST added to rates listed) All personal and family announcements: \$6.00 per sq. in. rose@christiancourier.ca Display advertising re businesses and organizations: \$8.00 per square inch. email: ads@christiancourier.ca

PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.

PERSONAL ADS: *Christian Courier* would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.

SUBMITTING YOUR AD

Mail: *Christian Courier*
5 Joanna Dr
St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail see above

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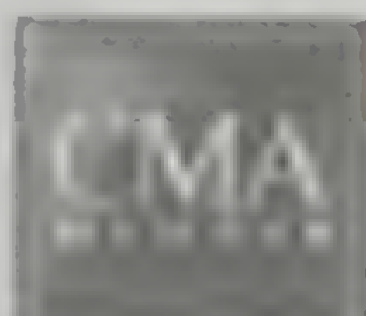


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Classifieds

Anniversaries

Happy 40th Anniversary to

JOHN AND RIA BUYS

of Owen Sound on Saturday March 15th, 2008.
May God continue to bless you with joy. (Jeremiah 31:13b)

Love from your children and grandchildren.

Address: John & Ria Buys

385 3rd Street "A" West, Owen Sound ON N4K 6Y8

1958

2008

With thanksgiving and praise to God we announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary on March 20
of our parents and Opa & Oma



JOHN AND JENNY BLEKKENHORST

With love from your children and grandchildren:

John & Rhea

Alice & Tim Scheepstra

Rachel, Daniel, Sarah

Diana & Barry Bonvanie

Jenna & Jeff, Luke, Andrea, Rueben, Hannah, Curtis, Nathan
Ed

Jenny & Bill VanCaulart

Jocelyn, Levi

Jasper & Cynthia

Daylin, McKenna

Open House on

Saturday, March 29, 2008

From 2 to 4 p.m. at the

Georgetown Christian Reformed Church

11611 Trafalgar Road, Georgetown, Ontario

Home address: RR3 Georgetown ON L7G 4S6

1958 ~ March 28 ~ 2008

With great joy and thankfulness to our LORD, we hope to celebrate
the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of our dear parents,
grandparents and great-grandparents

DICK AND HENNIE GROOT (nee Veenstra)

We give thanks and praise to our faithful heavenly Father
for richly blessing their marriage and are thankful
for all that he has given us through them.

We have witnessed that God has been their constant source
of strength and guidance and it is our prayer that he
will continue to bless them and keep them in his care.
Great is thy Faithfulness!

With all our love:

Rick & Tracey Groot, Smithers, B.C.

Randall, Blaine, Dallas, Paige

Arlene & Andrew Leffers, Houston, B.C.

Karl & Gilbert Van der Woerd - Kailoe, Braden, Kenadie

Darren Leffers & Renee Bontkes

Kevin, Brendan and Ryan

Linda & Adrian Schat, Smithers, B.C.

Melissa & Tracy

Stan Groot, Langley, B.C.

Carol & Ivan Widen, Smithers, B.C.

Shari - Trenton

Joel, Justine, Matthew

Brian & Heidi Groot, Vancouver, B.C.

Mailing address: Box 520, Smithers BC V0J 2N0



With thanksgiving to God,
we announce the **55th Wedding Anniversary** of our
parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

HENRY AND WILLY ZOMER

on March 24, 2008

The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. Heb. 13:6

Henry & Grace Zomer

Amy & Joel VanGurp - Grace

Cassandra Zomer

Nicole & Dan Wikkerink

Sarah Zomer

Wilma, JoAnn, & Arlene Zomer

Janet & Dale Beer

Matthew, Jacob, Emily

Address: 5903-800 Chieftain St, Woodstock ON N4T 1T8

Trenton 1953

April 2

Brighton 2008

And now abide faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love.
1 Cor. 13:13



With great joy and thankfulness to our LORD,
we are happy to announce the **55th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

PETER AND GERDA VERKUYL (nee Voskamp)

Congratulations Dad & Mom, Opa & Oma

With love: Dick & Joan Verkuyl, Newcastle Ont

John & Patricia Vermeulen, Campbellford Ont.

John & Rose Verkuyl, Bowmanville, Ont.

Henry & Shirley Verkuyl, Bowmanville, Ont

John & Jody TerHaar, Codrington, Ont.

18 grandchildren & 4 great-grandchildren

Home address: 104 Raglan St, Brighton ON K0K 1H0

Congratulations to our parents

FRANK AND RITA (nee Stam) Weening

as they celebrate the special occasion of their
50th Wedding Anniversary.

We will be having an **Open House**

on March 28, 2008

from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

at the Springdale Christian Reformed Church
1466 Sideroad 5, Bradford, Ontario

Best Wishes Only Please

We thank God for the blessings he has
given you both these last 50 years.

And we pray for his continued blessing on your marriage

Love and congratulations from your children & grandchildren

Grace & John Buisman,

Scott, Greg, Julie & fiancé James Rooleveld, David

Doug & Brenda Weening,

Emily, Nick, Richard

Amy & Albert Brown,

Sarah, Elijah, Christina, Joseph

Elaine & John VanDyk,

Dennis, Melanie, Jodie, Jennifer, Shannon

Carrie & Len Kooy.

Felicia, Andrew, Thomas, Darren, Evan

Contact Information: Frank & Rita Weening

860 Edward Ave, Newmarket ON L3Y 4V9



1953

April 2

2008

And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20b

With deep thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we joyfully announce the
55th Wedding Anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

BERT AND JO (Johanna) OOSTERHOF (nee Overweg)

Your faith throughout your many years together, in joys and sorrows, has never
wavered. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless you both and be your daily
strength and joy. We love you very much Dad and Mom, Opa and Oma!!!

Leo & Susan, Brockville

Alex & Julie, Athens

Diane & John VandeMeent, Bowmanville

Paul & Wilma, Inkerman

Henry & Evelina, Athens

Gary & Corina, Kingston

Annette & Robert Schreuders, Rockton

And your 22 grandchildren and 4 great-children

Their mailing address: 10622 Jellyby Road RR 4, North Augusta ON K0G 1R0

March 20, 1958, Leeuwarden (Fr.)

March 20, 2008, Strathroy Ont

50th Wedding Anniversary of

JELLE AND HILDA (nee v.d. Meer) SCHAT

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the
greatest of these is love.* 1 Cor. 13:13 NKJV




An Open House
celebration will be
held on Saturday,
May 17, 2008 from
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
at Trillium Village hall
400 Dominion Street
Strathroy, Ont

(we are having this
celebration in May
to avoid
March snow storms)

Love and the very best wishes for more happy years together from your family:
Shirley & Bert Knoop - Jessica, Nick & Sabrina, Chris & Jolene, Jayden, Mylee, Kolby
Joel & Marina Schat - Joshua, Janine
Clarissa & Gary Unger - Sara, Rachel
Derek & Nancy Schat - Ryan

Correspondence: 60-400 Dominion St, Strathroy ON N7G 3G8

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Personal	Vacation	For Sale
<p>Woman in Toronto area would like to meet gentleman between 60 and 66 years old, for friendship or companionship (marriage not excluded). Interests or hobbies are walking, swimming, reading, theatre, concerts, family and friends. Reply to File #2762 c/o Christian Courier 5 Joanna Dr. St. Catharines, ON L2N 1C1</p>	<p>For rent: 2 bedroom, 2 bath guest cottage in Tallahassee Florida. \$650 per week furnished with linens, close to state park, hiking & biking trails, tennis. Call 850-386-6648.</p>	<p>Dutch Theological books and commentaries. Please call 905-892-4352</p> 
<p>For Rent</p> <p>SHARED ACCOMODATION-Niagara Falls, one or two bedrooms on main floor or basement bedroom. Parking, laundry. 500+ utilities. Female student or young professional. Close to Brock U and Niagara College, bus route & QEW. Non Smoking, no pets. Available immediately. Call 905 353 1958</p>	<p>Holiday in Holland Beautiful self-contained cottage in Friesland www.chestnutlane.nl.</p>	<p>Friendship Day in Burlington sponsored by The Canada Netherlands Friendship Association. May 3 - flag raising ceremony at Burlington City Hall at 12 noon. May 5 - Monday the celebration will continue at the beautiful Royal Botanical Gardens. Doors open at 6 p.m. program starts at 7 p.m. The 'Tops' a Dubbelmannenkwardet from Grijpskerk/Hoogkerk and the 48th Highlanders of Holland-Pipes and Drums of Apeldoorn will be part of the evening celebration. The event is free. For more information visit www.cnfa.ca or contact Jack Van der Laan 905 332 7000 or Hans Kloet 905 336 7184</p>

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Deadline: September 30/08.

Job Opportunities

To see all recently advertised positions, see our website at www.christiancourier.ca

Pastoral Position

Immanuel CRC of Simcoe, Ontario is looking to fill a pastoral vacancy. If you feel led by the Spirit to inquire into this ad, please contact the secretary of the search committee, Julie Berkel at 519-428-0054, or email peptom@hotmail.com. Vision and church profile will be provided upon request.

Mountainview CRC in Grimsby, Ontario is seeking a full-time

Youth Pastor or Director

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Grimsby ON L3M 4N5

Fax (905)945-1211

Email: info@shalommanor.ca

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Worldwide Christian Schools (WWCS) is a Christian organization providing hope to children in developing countries through Christ-centred education.

Send cover letter and resume to:

Worldwide Christian Schools
70 Lancing Drive, Hamilton ON L8W 3A1
866-360-4274 canada@wwcs.org

Full job description available upon request.

IMMANUEL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA

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 - **Grade 5 - Lethbridge Campus**
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2010 - 5 Avenue North
Lethbridge, Alberta T1H 0N5
Phone: (403) 317-7860
Fax: (403) 317-7862
Email: henry.ronda@gmail.com
- *****
- **One position: Jr/Sr High Art (45%), Junior High Subject Level (55%) - Lethbridge Campus**
 - **One Term Position: Junior High - (Primarily Social Studies) Lethbridge Campus**
Mr. Rob vanSpronsen, Principal
Immanuel Christian High School
802 - 6 Avenue North
Lethbridge, Alberta T1H 0S1
Phone: (403) 328-4783
Fax: (403) 327-6333
Email: rvanspronsen@immanuelcs.ca
- *****
- **Two Positions (Grades 4-7, Science or French would be an asset) - Taber Campus**
Mr. John Bronsema, Principal
Immanuel Christian Taber Campus
4809 - 60 Avenue
Taber, Alberta T1G 1E9
Phone: (403) 223-4550
Fax: (403) 223-4693
Email: taberchristian@shaw.ca

WOODLAND CHRISTIAN
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invites applications for a **teaching position** for the 2008-2009 school year. Teachers who are qualified to teach in the following areas are encouraged to apply:

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Please address inquiries to John VanPelt, Principal at principal@woodland.on.ca.

Information about Woodland Christian High School is available on our website at www.woodland.on.ca



is seeking qualified applicants for a possible opening for a one year term position at the

intermediate level

commencing in September 2008. If you love Christ and his children, are a qualified teacher and are interested in being part of a dynamic team of educators we look forward to hearing from you. Please send your resume and a statement of faith to:

Paul Triemstra, Principal
Ottawa Christian School
2191 Benjamin Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario K2A 1P6

Tel: (613) 722-5836
Fax: (613) 722-1793
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ALBERTA

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youth opportunities>>>



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Please consider how God can use you! Check out:
http://www.youthunlimited.org/missions/index_missions.html

If you would like to be a participant or mentor please contact
 Tamara DeWaard: tamarakoens@hotmail.com
 or Ron Hosmar: youthpastor@calvincrc.ca.

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

- March 29 - Hamilton** - 25th Anniversary Concert by the 130 voice of the Hosanna Choir at Hamilton Place at 7:30 p.m. Guests include the Mattaniah Male Choir, Liselotte Rokyta - panflute and many others. All under the direction of Herman den Hollander. Tickets are \$10 and \$15, available at ticketmaster* outlets, CoppsColliseum Box office, ticketmaster.ca* or charge by phone at 905-527-7666, 416-870-8000* (*convenience fee at ticketmaster) or contact the choir at 905-628-1211 visit www.hosanna-choir.org
- March 29** Missions Conference at Bethel CRC, **Waterdown** for local church leaders, missions advocates, and short term missions participants. For registration information visit Christian Reformed World Missions at www.crwmm.org or contact John & Margaret den Otter 905-331-3205 or jdenotter@cogeco.ca
- April 12** Annual Festival of Praise - Rehoboth United Reformed Church opposite HDCH, **Hamilton** 7:30 p.m. - 4 male choirs participating: Ambassadors; The Choraliers; Collegium Musicum and The Crusaders. For info or tickets: vaneekae@sympatico.ca or p-b.degroot@sympatico.ca or go www.schuurman.ca/ambassadors.htm Tickets \$12 and \$10 for seniors.
- April 13** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry R. DeBolster will be preaching.
- April 19, 20** Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. Celebrations and special events will be held on Saturday April 19 at 7 p.m. and Sunday April 20 during the 10 a.m. service.
- May 2-4** Marriage encounter weekend in **London, ON**. For more information or to register on-line, go to www.reformedme.org or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org
- May 3, 5** Friendship day, in **Burlington** sponsored by The Canada Netherlands Friendship Association. For more information visit www.cnfa.ca or contact Jack Van der Laan 905 332 7000 or Hans Kloet 905 336 7184. See details page 17.

Ontario Christian Gleaners

"Equipping for the Harvest"

Fundraising Dinner - Saturday April 5th 6:30pm
Dundas Calvin Christian School -
542 Ofield Rd. N. Dundas ON

Doors open at 6pm - No cost - freewill offering

Goal: \$300,000 to purchase equipment and cover operating costs in time for this years harvest.

Speaker - Bob Ellis, Okanagan Gleaners Plant Manager
R.S.V.P by March 25, 2008 to 905-659-7366 or email : info@ontariogleaners.org

The Ontario Christian Gleaners (OCG), a charitable organization, will be setting up a food processing operation in order to make a dehydrated soup mix from surplus donated vegetables to help feed those in need.

For information on the OCG or the dinner please visit our web site at www.ontariogleaners.org



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MISSIONS CONFERENCE

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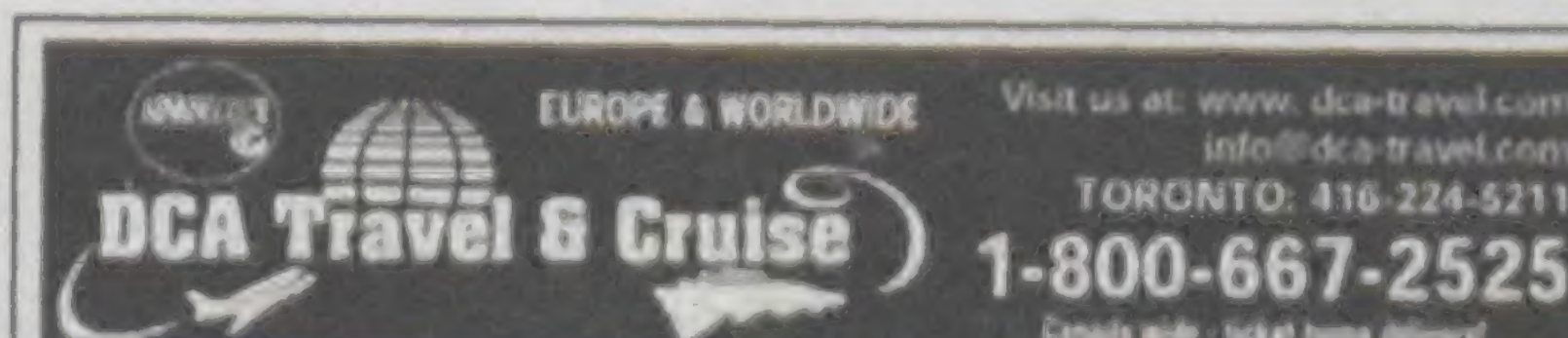
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News

Malaysians to vote against creeping Islamisation

Elizabeth Kendal

AUSTRALIA (ANS) – For a long, long time, progressive Malaysians have been content with the status quo, believing the only alternative was the instant Islamisation advocated by PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia). What they did not realise however was that the status quo meant creeping Islamisation.

Malaysians are becoming aware of the degree to which decades of creeping Islamisation is now threatening their whole society. A showdown is brewing between the Islamists and the libertarians who want global engagement, modernisation and liberty. This group includes liberal Malays, Hindus (ethnic Indians), ethnic Chinese and Christians. (Some 80 percent of Malaysia's Christians are ethnic Chinese). While Muslim hardliners are agitating for more Sharia, libertarian forces are desperately trying to head off disaster. Multitudes of Malaysians are coming to believe that the status quo is no longer acceptable, and for them the March 8 general elections are an opportunity not to be missed.

In the general elections held on March 8 the ruling United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) – the coalition of communal parties that has ruled Malaysia as a political hegemon since independence – won, but by a much slimmer margin than expected. So the elections saw the rise of serious political opposition built on a platform of non-communalism, religious liberty and a commitment to Malaysia's secular constitution.

Religion and race

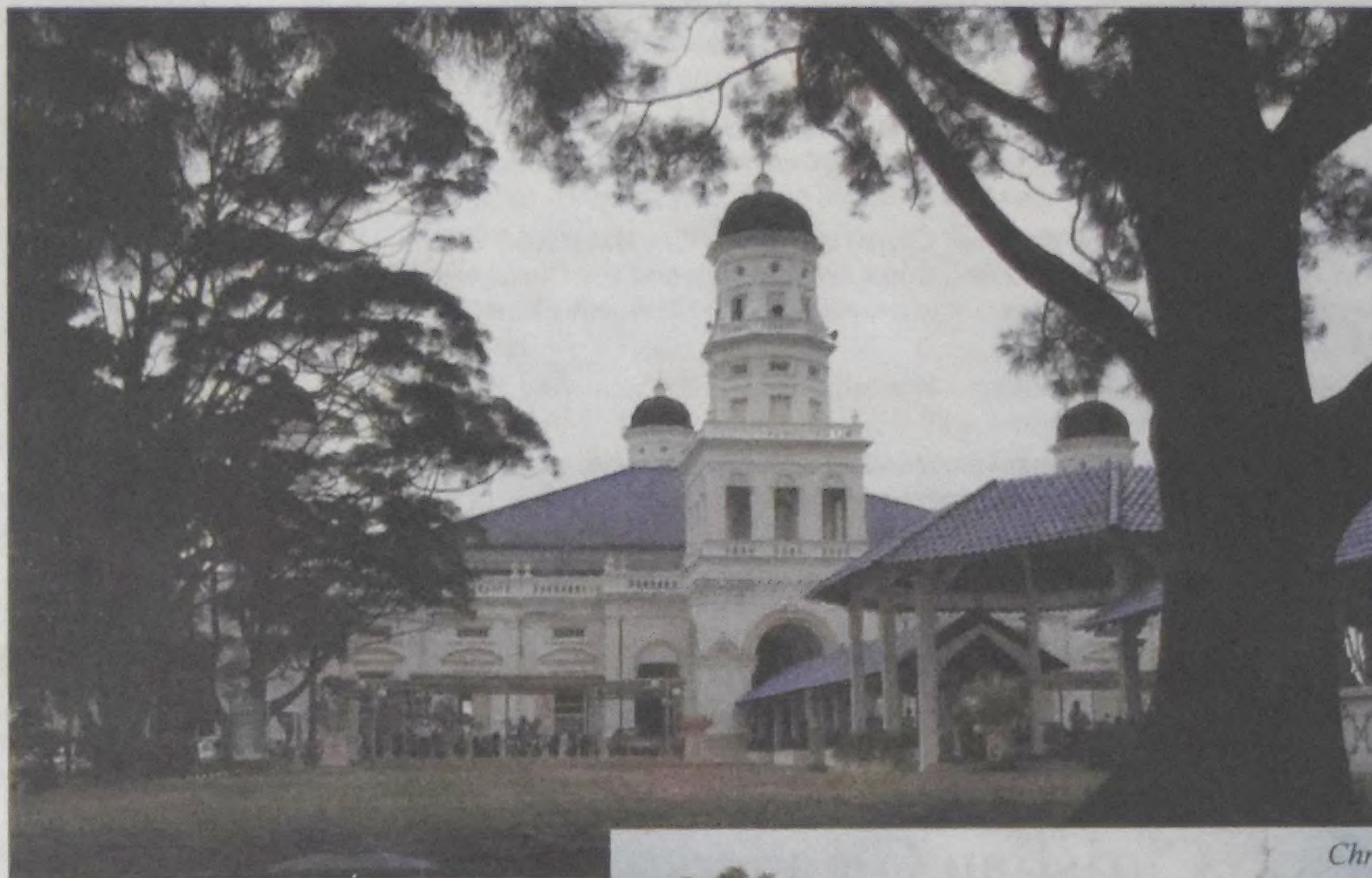
On March 3, *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) ran an article entitled "Malaysia's PM braced for religious backlash". This article, the first in a three-part series on Malaysia's forthcoming general elections, examined the disenchantment felt by Malaysian Christians and Hindus and their resolve to voice their concerns at the ballot box.

As SCMP reports: "Racial and religious discrimination against Malaysia's minority Chinese and Indian voters has become a key plank of the opposition campaign in the March 8 polls."

"In the past four years the country had been wracked by disputes between majority Malays – who are almost all Muslims – and minority Christians and Hindus. The disputes have covered issues including the right to convert, custody of children, burial and freedom of religion."

Motivated by a growing awareness that their liberty is seriously under threat – an awareness fed by recent events such as Lina Joy's apostasy trial, book bans and Bible seizures – Malaysia's churches called on Christians to examine the platforms of the candidates, and vote for those who champion religious freedom.

Associated Press (AP) reported: "The call illustrates growing concern among religious minorities who feel their rights are being eroded by a rise in Islamic fervour, which many blame on overzealous Muslim bu-



Sultan Abu Mosque, Malaysia

reaucrats in Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's government.

"Churches have begun handing out brochures urging Christians to examine the platforms and records of political parties on 'freedom of religion, conscience and speech' before casting their ballots in March 8 national elections."

Hermen Shastri, executive secretary of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, told AP that while the churches remain totally non-partisan they are concerned by "the trend of Islamisation and how that is affecting other religious communities". He told SCMP, "We can't vote blindly any more... We need lawmakers to defend our secular constitution and religious freedom."

While non-Muslims and progressives are agitating for liberty, Islamists are pressing for what is essentially talibanisation. AP reports: "Some 100 Islamic groups in Malaysia called Wednesday [Feb 20] for wider powers for Shariah courts and stricter enforcement of religious and moral doctrines ahead of general elections next month."

"In a list of election demands, the groups said the government should declare Malaysia an Islamic-majority nation and reject any attempt to make it a secular state. The demands were made by the Defenders of Islam, a loose coalition of about 100 mostly conservative Islamic organisations representing students, professionals and others."

"The groups' statement called for asserting 'the significant role of Islam in the state'. It also called for the power of Islamic Shariah courts to be strengthened and new laws to block the propagation of other religions among Muslims, especially in states with large minority populations."

"The groups sought more Islamic studies in schools, increased scholarships for Muslims and the implementation of Islamic practices, such as prayers during school assemblies."



Christ Church, Melaka, Malaysia

They also said television stations should ban Western entertainment."

According to Yusri Mohamad, president of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia which leads the coalition, Malaysia's racial and religious tensions are the fault of certain groups which challenge Islam's role in the multiracial country. He told AP that the Defenders of Islam's demands, which will be distributed to all candidates and political parties, were aimed at highlighting Muslim needs, not countering the Christian campaign.

Sensing the discontent, PM Abdullah Badawi is busy being all things to all men, promising elections "goodies" as needed. In the Malay PAS stronghold of Kelantan he promises more mosques and development. In Chinese-majority Penang he promises more schools, land and University places for the Chinese. He is promising Muslims there will be more Islamic law, while promising non-Muslims there will be liberty, consensus and solidarity.

In a March 4 SCMP article entitled "Ma-

laysian parties desperate to woo Chinese electors" – the second in its three part series – social activist Ramakrishnan Ponnusamy asks, "In Terengganu, Abdullah said he will defend Islamic sharia. He comes to Penang and says he will defend secular rights. How is he going to do it?"

One very interesting and encouraging revelation from this SCMP article is that the Chinese are realising that, because their birth rate is so much lower than the Malay birth rate, Chinese political influence can only decline into the future. For this reason, they are seeing they

must advocate on a non-communal basis and secure rights for all, not just for the Chinese.

"The changing demographics mean Chinese-based parties are competing for a smaller pool of voters, and more constituencies are becoming mixed-race. 'As the Chinese numbers shrink, their political clout will also shrink,' Mr Wong said. 'Playing on the fears of Chinese to win votes will not work in the future. The solution is to form meaningful alliances with the Malay opposition and struggle for the interest of all Malaysian people, not just Chinese.'"

(SCMP, March 4)

If a serious, credible, non-communal, rights-affirming opposition committed to Malaysia's secular constitution can be consolidated, then the March 8 general elections may prove to be a watershed moment for Malaysian politics. It would however be only the beginning of a long struggle that would require strength, courage and commitment. For as the forces of liberty resist creeping Islamisation, Islamists will doubtless do everything in their power to resist the forces of liberty.